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MISS FLORENCE WARDEN.—“The author of ‘House on the Marsh’ is young and pretty—a dainty figure, supple, graceful, and very modest in her bearing and manner. The story of her life,” says Joseph Hatton in the *Christian Union*, “may be briefly told. Her father was a stock-broker, and she and her only sister were born at Hanworth, near London. They were brought up as children in affluence and luxury, but just when they had finished their education their father failed in business, and they were thrown upon their own resources. ‘We both,’ she said to my friend, ‘obtained situations as governesses. I was in a clergyman’s family. I had always felt a strong desire to write, and when the misfortune of our broken home came upon us I determined to persevere until I wrote something that the public would be anxious to read. My position as governess gave me all the leisure and opportunities necessary for the effort. I had read widely, my education had been comprehensive, and, as much of it had been obtained in France, I could speak French almost as well as English. My first success in the way of stories was the acceptance by the present Mr. Charles Dickens of a short story called “King Combe” for *All the Year Round*. That was in 1877 or 1878; but before that I had had published in the *Live Stock Journal* my very first effort—a poem entitled “The Squire’s Last Ride,” for which I remember I received a guinea. But it was a hard and depressing struggle. I wrote story after story—short novelettes—and sent them to different editors, but got them back unfailingly. I began to tire of my life as a governess—its consistent dullness, imbittered by constant failure with my pen—and I determined to go on the stage, not, however, relinquishing my literary ambition. That was five years ago, and my sister joined the profession at the same time.’ They are now both acting in Florence Warden’s play, founded on her story, and are likely to become as affluent as their father was when his financial failure compelled them to go forth and seek their fortunes.”

AT THE WORLD'S MERCY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE HOUSE ON THE MARSH," ETC.

Wm. Florence Warden

Warden, Florence. At the world's mercy.
[Anon.] N. Y., Appleton, 1884. 171 p. D.
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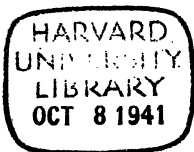
Again, as in "The house on the marsh," by the same author, the party that tells the story is a young governess; she is the inmate of a house in Kent, England, belonging to a wealthy man, who has, with his two young sons, an unfortunate propensity for drinking. The wife is a vain, weak, fashionable beauty, and the children spoilt and rough. Guinevere Verney turns out to be the good angel of the family; her good influence works wonders with all the characters, and she is the centre of a rather sad love story. Introduced, naturally, in the story, is an account of a home for inebriates, that presents a terrible picture of the way in which the inmates are treated.

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AT THE WORLD'S MERCY.

CHAPTER I.

WHENEVER I hear of a wife or widow and young family left suddenly unprovided for, I reckon up the children on this wise—so many ne'er-do-wells and so many governesses. I have met with exceptions, but the rule is sound.

When my father, a wealthy manufacturer, failed in business, he railed at the world for a little while, and then, calling us together, made us a manly and affecting speech, in which he compared himself to Hercules, and declared his resolution to fight the world for us all, and win us another luxurious home; then he set out for Australia in search of his labors, leaving my mother and sister and myself in lodgings in Pimlico, and recommending us to the care of my brother, a lad of twenty, who had just been expelled from college. My high-spirited mother rather resented my father's conduct, and was of opinion that it would have been more heroic to remain and starve with us at Pimlico than to run away and let us starve alone.

It was at this point that we promised to follow the rule I have stated.

My sister Elsie, who was sixteen, and I, two years older, never for one moment thought of looking for support to James, who threw his arms dramatically round my mother's neck and declared for the fiftieth time that he would "turn over a new leaf"; but we instinctively took up the advertisement-sheet of the "Times." My mother sold her jewels without a murmur, and said what a good thing it was that she had always been so famous for her strict

economy. But it was a virtue that did not bear transplanting from Queen's Gate to Pimlico. When my mother traveled by railway, she said she did not mind going third-class, but she would not go second; and, as we could not allow her to travel third-class, she went "first."

Our lodgings were small and smoky, but at first Elsie and I agreed that, if this was adversity, it was rather pleasant for a change. We had been very naughty as children, and rather troublesome as growing girls, restless and difficult to manage; but now the new sense of mingled freedom and responsibility seemed to have done us good. We felt that we were young and strong; people had told us that we were clever—indeed, we told each other so. Our mother lamented that our father had spoiled our "future"; why should we not make a "future" for ourselves? My sister, at an early age, had drawn and painted large-eyed nymphs with more hair than the lady in the advertisement for a certain wonderful hair-restorer, and they had been spoken of in the drawing-room as showing undoubted genius. I, at fourteen, had written a story which our maid pronounced to be "intensely interesting." But Elsie and I had too much sense to suppose that our daubing and scribbling would prove profitable yet, if they ever did; and so we turned naturally to "tuition."

Elsie had one other talent, which, however, the rest of us took care to disparage. She inherited my mother's taste for amateur theatricals; and a little encouragement would have made her turn her thoughts to the stage. Perhaps she did turn them thither; but the lightest suggestion of it would draw down such a storm about "respectability, honesty, virtue," from my mother, and such a chilling look from myself, that she dared not think seriously about it.

Luckily for us, we spoke French with correctness and fluency, and with an artfully exaggerated roll of the "r's" that struck awe into British papas and mammas, so Elsie got a daily engagement in London and studied at the South Kensington School of Design, while I went into Worcestershire to teach in a clergyman's family. I had three pupils not much younger than myself, and this lucky circumstance made me work hard to keep ahead of them. I have heard of snubbed and neglected governesses, never of a spoiled gov-

erness; yet I was one. I was treated as a heroine on account of my "courage in misfortune," though fortune never favored me more than in sending me under the roof of my kind employer.

My mother, who said that her only aim in life was to keep a home for her children, left the lodgings and took a house in that part of West Brompton which delights to call itself South Kensington, where poor little Elsie slept, and ate her hurried meals, I spent my half-yearly holiday, and James looked in when he had nothing worse to do. In these circumstances my mother, who had been a beauty and was handsome still, found it dull. She had a little property in Essex—a few small houses, the roofs and gas-pipes of which were always wanting repairs, and the occupants of which often ran away, after a few quarters, without paying their rent. With the very little money these brought in, some help from old friends, and the produce of the sale of her plate and jewels, my mother bravely struggled on; but it was bravery without the piquancy of applause, and she chafed under it.

When I had been teaching in the clergyman's family three years, I came back for my midsummer holidays, to find Elsie alone in the house with the servant. Mamma had found some new friends lately, she said—a literary man and his wife, named Hunter—and the acquaintance between the two ladies had grown quickly into intimacy. Two days before, when Elsie had come back from her afternoon's work, Mrs. Hunter, who was with my mother, had jumped up from her chair and rushed impetuously upon my sister.

"Now, my dear Miss Verney, doesn't your dear mamma want a change? My husband and I are going to spend a few weeks at Boulogne, and I have been trying to persuade her to come too; it would do her all the good in the world."

"I looked at mamma," went on Elsie; "she wore the expression of a martyr, and she said she could not leave me. I saw that there was nothing to do but to agree to the plan, so I reminded her that you were coming home; and, to tell you the truth, Guinny my darling, I think mamma hurried off yesterday because she felt you would not approve of this expedition."

"She was right; I don't at all. Who are these people—and what do they want to get from her?"

"Oh, I don't think it is so bad as that! Mamma is too clever to let herself be imposed upon for long by mere sharpers. The worst they will do is to get tired of each other, I think."

"And to go away and leave you all alone, when it is you who want the change, not she! You are looking so pale and thin, my poor darling—you are working a great deal too hard, and mamma ought not to allow it."

"How can she prevent it? And I'm not working hard; I'm going to take a whole holiday all the time you are here."

"Yes; you will draw all day long until your back aches and your eyes are red and swollen, and then you will go out at night to Dr. Zecchi's lectures."

"Last night was the last of the term, and the male students gave him three cheers. You will be so angry; I let Miss Maitland's brother—he is a student, you know—walk home with his sister and me. I couldn't request him to leave his sister and walk on the other side of the road because my sister objected to my speaking to a male student, could I?"

"Well, you ought to be careful. But I excuse it this time, as you were all alone and dull."

"Oh, but I was not indeed! I know it is very wicked to say so; but you can't think how much I enjoyed having the house to myself, and not finding Hunters in all the crevices!"

"What has become of the Misses Grove who pervaded the place last holidays?"

"Oh, we discovered that there was something wrong about the Groves! It was not that we had got tired of them, of course, or that they had got tired of flattering us; but now we never mention them, their names are never heard, except sometimes as those 'dreadful Groves!' Well, the Hunters are better than they, at any rate; they do aspire their 'h's.' Oh, Guinny, fancy being alone together for four or five weeks, with no Groves and no Hunters, or any other members of mamma's constantly changing army of dear friends to assault and batter us! You shall write your novel, and I will draw you as Diana or Dolly Varden. You would make a sweet little Dolly Varden! Oh, my darling, don't write any more cross letters telling me I think more of the male students than I do of

you! Do you think it possible that I could ever care for any of them half as much as for you?"

"I should think not indeed!" I answer with elder-sisterly sharpness. "I am not afraid of that; but I don't like those rough boys even to look at you."

In truth, I knew I could trust in her discretion; but I felt it my duty, as elder sister, to give pretty fair-haired Elsie a half-yearly lecture on the demureness and staidness proper to girls in our position.

"That is no position," commented Elsie.

It was August when I returned. We had hardly any friends. We had fallen out of the way of most of them since our poverty; so we told each other that we were quite the only people left in town, and gave ourselves up to enjoying our holidays in our own fashion, reading, writing, drawing, and playing together, and never tiring of each other's society. My mother had left behind her Maynard, an old servant, who had been with her fourteen years, as lady's maid in the time of our prosperity, as lady's maid, housemaid, and cook, since. So we had no trouble about housekeeping, except that of being economical, always a hard task to me.

The road we lived in was as uninteresting as a road could be; the houses had small yards at the back, which some of the tenants tried to pass off as gardens, and at the bottom ran the high wall of a livery-stable; above it one could see the backs of more ugly houses, and beyond them distant chimney-pots; but, thanks to my mother, the interior of the house was pleasant enough. The ground-floor contained two rooms, separated by folding-doors. The front one was the sitting-room. The ugly street was shut out from view by lace curtains; a few water-color sketches hung on the tinted walls, with brackets laden with old china and other relics; the furniture was grey and dark blue, relieved by bright cushions and footstools worked by my mother. There was a piano—another relic—and a harp which no one used, but which looked pretty; and there were flowers. At the back was another dainty room, my mother's. Elsie and I used to sit with the folding-doors open, to enjoy the view of the Virginia creeper which now covered the stable-wall at the back. In the afternoon we would often walk to

the Museum, and spend an hour or two in the libraries, silently studying, or sometimes silently looking at "Punch." After tea was our play-time, and then we set the musical box going and danced. Sometimes Maynard would look in at us with a benignant smile at our folly. She was fond of us, but she looked upon us as helpless but harmless lunatics, and I know she felt a secret contempt for the people who could be foolish enough to pay us to teach their children.

One evening, returning late from the Museum, we saw a tall man, dressed like a gentleman, walking unsteadily along the pavement in front of us.

"Oh, Elsie, that man is intoxicated! Let us walk slowly till he has passed our house," said I.

But in a minute more he staggered, and clung to the railings; and, as we drew nearer, we found that he was leaning upon our own gate.

"What shall we do, Elsie?" cried I.

"Do! Why, go in of course! I'll make him move."

She left me to follow, and walked quickly up to the gate.

"If you please, will you let us go in?" said she resolutely.

The man let go, and stepped back, raising his hat; but he staggered again. To my surprise, Elsie sprang forward and supported him.

"Elsie, how can you? Do you know him?" whispered I.

"No—hush! He is not tipsy—he is ill," she whispered back rapidly, still with her arm in his.

Then he spoke, clearly enough, yet, as it seemed, with difficulty.

"Thank you very much"—to Elsie. Then to me—"You need not be afraid of my assaulting you, madam; I'm not drunk. But, if you will call a policeman and give me in charge, it will be the kindest thing you can do, as I am afraid I can't get much further."

"I beg your pardon—oh, I beg your pardon!" said I, hot with shame and remorse. "Please will you come in and rest a few minutes? And then perhaps you will be better, and we will get a cab for you."

I opened the gate, ran up the steps, unlocked the door with my key, and hastened down again to help him in. Elsie had overcome

his objections—indeed he was too ill to object much to anything—and we led him into the sitting-room. As I went back to shut the door, I heard Elsie cry “Oh!” and then a fall; and I turned and saw that he had slipped from the sofa on to the floor. When I noticed the ghastly whiteness of his face I thought he was dead, and I gave a cry of horror. But Elsie was down upon her knees beside him in a moment, taking off his cravat and opening his shirt-collar. Then I knew that he had only fainted, and I rang the bell sharply, and, taking a rose out of a glass of water on the table, began sprinkling his face with trembling fingers.

“Don’t drown him,” said Elsie.

I never saw such amazement and horror on any human face as on Maynard’s, when she opened the door and saw Elsie and me leaning over the stranger.

“We have sprinkled him and we have undone his collar; what must we do next, Maynard?” asked my sister anxiously.

“Good gracious, ma’am, whoever is he?” she exclaimed, as soon as she could speak.

“He is our brother, and your brother, and I think he is going to die, Maynard,” said Elsie impetuously.

Maynard gave a little toss of her head, as if bringing a strange corpse upon our hands was just the climax of rashness and folly she had always expected us to reach, and then she quietly made the best of it.

“You had better just leave him to me, ma’am, and open the windows; and you light the gas, please, Miss Guinevere.”

We obeyed, while she laid our patient flat upon the floor in a business-like manner.

“Now you had better both go up-stairs, and I will bring him to and send him away quietly,” said she.

“But it would be rude of us to let him go without seeing him again, Maynard,” returned Elsie. “And I am afraid he will want to stay and thank us.”

“He won’t stay any longer than I can help, you may be sure of that, Miss Elsie,” said Maynard grimly.

“But don’t say anything sharp to him, please,” urged I humbly;

and, for fear of exasperating her further, we went down-stairs to our little dark dining-room.

"I believe she will put his hat on his head, push him out of the house, and shut the door upon him as soon as he opens his eyes," said I.

"Oh, no, she won't do that! She must see that he is really ill, and she will be as kind as possible now that we are out of the way. You see it was rather a rash thing for us to do, to take a stranger in like that, when we are all alone here too! You see he is quite a young man; he can't be more than five or six and twenty."

"I don't see that we are to be inhuman just because we are young. And we couldn't insult a sick man, and then leave him to die in the street, just because he is young."

"No; but, if he were to die in the house, it would be awkward. Don't think I mean that we ought to have left him, Guinny; you did what was right and generous. But I think Maynard is right in saying that she will see him off, and not we."

"Yes, I suppose she is; still I feel so miserable about my mistake——"

"But you have made the most honorable amends, and I am sure he must be satisfied. I don't hear any sound up-stairs; he is a long time getting better."

We sat there for some time, getting anxious at the stillness overhead. At last the bell rang. We ran up-stairs to the sitting-room. The young stranger was lying back on the sofa, and his face was as flushed as it had been pale before. Maynard stopped us at the door.

"This is a nice business, Miss Guinevere. He is very ill; I believe he has a fever. I will run for a doctor, and then for a cab, to get him off to the hospital as soon as possible."

"The hospital! Can't he tell you where he lives?"

"No. He tried to walk, and he couldn't; he could only say, 'Send me to hospital.' But we must have a doctor to get him off."

Maynard soon hurried away, and returned in a few moments with a medical man, who lived a few doors off, a stranger to us.

"We must not let him know that the gentleman is a stranger, if we can help it, Guinevere," said Elsie.

We whispered this instruction to Maynard, and then went into

our mother's room and shut the folding-doors. Through them we could hear what passed when the doctor came. He said it was fever, but he could not yet tell of what kind.

"You must get him to bed," said he.

Elsie and I started in horror.

"Oh, no, sir!" we heard Maynard say quickly and decidedly.

"He is only a visitor, and he wishes to be taken to the hospital."

"I suppose you don't want to kill him outright, even if he is 'only a visitor.' Where is your master? Where is your mistress? Are they so afraid of contagion that they run away and leave you to bundle off their guest to the hospital?"

"My mistress is away, sir, and there are only two young ladies, her daughters, in the house."

"Let me see them."

Elsie squeezed my hand. She was trembling; so was I.

"We had better go in and tell the truth; it is always the best and safest way," whispered she.

"Oh, Elsie, I don't think he would believe us!" I whispered back, the improbability of the story, if told to a stranger, striking me.

"We must try," said she. "Nothing is so bad as the least shadow of mystery. His voice is not that of a young man, and he will probably have the sense to know the truth when he hears it."

There was no light in my mother's room, and we could scarcely see the face of each other.

"Don't tremble so, Guinny darling," said Elsie.

"All right," whispered I; and then we opened the door and walked into the sitting-room.

The doctor turned round sharply and looked surprised. He was a middle-aged man, with a good face. We bowed, and I hastened to speak.

"We must apologize for having listened; but this is a serious matter to us, and we have to ask your advice," I said, hurriedly.

"That gentleman is quite a stranger to us. When my sister and I came home this evening, we found him at our gate, unable to walk. We asked him to come in—I thought a glass of wine would revive him; but, as soon as he got in, he fainted away, and our maid can tell you the rest. We were not in the room. We are alone here

with our servant; we have no friends who could help us nurse a sick person; and of course we do not know where his friends live. What are we to do?"

The doctor looked at me attentively while I spoke, and at both of us when I had finished.

"Of course in that case there is only one thing to be done; we must get him off to the hospital, and he must take his chance. You will have to send there for a cab, and I am afraid you must make up your minds to harbor him till it comes. In the mean time, I will take the responsibility of searching in his pockets to find out his name and address."

I had been trembling on the borders of a great resolution while the doctor spoke.

"Then he can not be moved without danger?"

"Well, no, not quite without some risk; he's got the fever on him, you see. But don't be alarmed; you will have nothing for which to blame yourselves. You have done more than most young ladies would have done for a stranger."

"Not quite enough, though, for a fellow-creature. We won't risk the danger of 'killing him outright.' Let him stay."

Elsie put her arm through mine.

"And we will nurse him as well as we can," she added, warmly.

"Gently, gently, young ladies," the doctor rejoined, smiling. "You think I considered you hard-hearted, and now you rush into the other extreme of romantic self-devotion. But you are mistaken. I think you have acted with great kindness—a little rashly, perhaps, if I may say so, in bringing a sick stranger into your house, but generously. And I think the hospital plan is not only sensible, but kind, as amateur nursing is praiseworthy, but sometimes defective."

"We are not going to try our 'prentice hands on him; we shall get a professional nurse," said I, coldly and decidedly.

"You are surely not in earnest, my dear young lady?"

"I am indeed."

"And supposing it turns to typhus, or something of that sort? And supposing the gentleman were to die in your house?"

"If you think him in danger of dying as it is, it would be down-

right murder to send him away," said I, looking up at him bravely; for I believed that he was only trying to frighten me.

He looked at the patient again, and then again at me.

"You really mean it, then?"

"Most solemnly I do."

"Yes, we do," echoed Elsie.

"You are good, brave girls, and you shall not be any the worse for it. Is there a bedroom on this floor?"

We prepared my mother's room; and then Elsie and I went away while Maynard and the doctor put the stranger, who was scarcely half conscious, to bed. We saw the doctor before he left.

"I have been looking in his pocket, but can only find that his clothes are marked 'E. Barach.' He has no pocket-book; he was probably half off his head when he went out. He is not in a condition to give any information about himself, and the only thing I can suggest is one which I can hardly advise—an advertisement."

"Oh, no, that would not do at all! We must just wait till he can speak."

"I think that would be best. And now about the nursing. I will send you a professional nurse, and, if it proves, as I hope, to be nothing infectious, you can help her if you like.

"Thank you. We are very much obliged to you for your kindness and advice."

"There is no kindness—it is all business. Now good night, good night. I have left instructions with your most discreet of house-keepers. I expect she will scold you when I am gone for having had the sense to tell me the truth, instead of puzzling me with some humbugging story about his being your brother or your cousin. Now I must not stand here talking, or I shall turn your heads with my pretty speeches; but I wish all the young ladies I have to deal with had half your sense and your humanity. Good night, good night, my dears. Have you a father living?"

"Yes, in Australia."

"Ah, well, if I were he, I wouldn't be so far off! Good night."

And at last he went away, leaving us laughing at his compliments. But in the midst of our laughter we heard a sound from the next room which silenced us.

"I tell you I will carry it through, and nothing in heaven or earth shall stop me!"

We had never heard the voice of a man in delirium before, and the fierce words and tone struck us with a sudden sense of the responsibility we had taken upon ourselves.

CHAPTER II.

ELSIE and I did try our 'prentice hands at nursing the patient, after all; we took our turns of watching in the sick-room when he was quiet; at other times, when we were in the next room, we could hear him talking loudly and excitedly. Then, when the crisis of the fever was past, and he lay all day with his eyes closed, we used to open the folding-doors, and keep alternate watch, while we went on with our drawing and writing.

At first we exchanged only whispers now and then, afraid of disturbing the sick man; but, as we got accustomed to the presence of the slumbering invalid, our voices rose gradually to their natural pitch, and our talk went on in the old way. We even found ourselves laughing; but then we would turn with a frightened "Hush!" to see the patient lying as motionless and torpid as ever.

"I believe he means to lie like that for ever, under the delusion that he is part of the furniture of the house; and we shall never be able to get rid of him," said Elsie, with comic despair.

The doctor himself could not understand his long torpor; the patient looked better, but Maynard had great difficulty in rousing him to take food, and when he had swallowed it he fell back into the same drowsy state.

"Suppose mamma were to come back suddenly, walk into her room before we could tell her, and find this young man," said I.

"It is very strange that she does not write to us; she has been away a fortnight, and yet we have not heard a word from her."

Our mother's silence made us both anxious as the days went by; but we knew she was not fond of letter-writing, and we were too busy to let our anxiety prey upon our minds. My pupils were old

enough to do without me, and I was staying with them only until I could find some more. This was not easy, as I was young, and many women value the instructress of their children at the number and depth of her wrinkles. Elsie, who hated teaching, worked hard with her pencil during these holidays, going some hours each day to the British Museum. I took up my practicing again; the doctor said, "If it rouses the invalid, so much the better." But it did not. Of all our trials he was the greatest; but he was certainly, as Elsie said, a "new interest in life" as well. Who was he? How did he get here? What would he say when he opened his eyes again upon the world, to find himself in the care of two unknown young women?

"Say?" said Elsie, cynically. "Why, he will say he is very much obliged to us, and offer us five pounds for our trouble!"

"Oh, Elsie, I do think he is a gentleman!"

"Has the very insensible stranger won that flinty heart which has never softened to any man in his senses, oh, my sister?" asked Elsie mockingly. "Mr. Burns may be shabbily dressed; but at least he has brains."

This Mr. Burns was another of my troubles. He was one of my sister's many admirers, a clever little student at the British Museum, who carried her easel about for her, brought her her luncheon, helped her with his advice—and it was good advice—about her drawing, and thought himself overpaid when she let him help her to put on her old water-proof—a mark of favor which drew down a torrent of wrath from me when she confessed it.

Elsie's admirers were a constant pain and grief to me. I do not think I was jealous; but it seemed to me to be beneath my sister's dignity to let herself be so universally worshiped. For she was a bright particular star at the "British." There male and female students worked in the same rooms, and a spirit of *camaraderie* sprang up among them. I did not like it; but I had been there, noticed that Elsie was treated with the respectful homage due to a queen from whom a word is a condescension, and returned home laughing at her toleration of such a dingy throng of admirers. Still I did not like to hear so much of Mr. Burns's brilliant remarks and profound criticism.

"I am tiring you with my chatter, Guinny," said she one day, when she saw an ominous frown gathering on my face.

"You know, Elsie dear, I am never tired of hearing you talk, only I wish it were not always about Mr. Burns."

"Why, Guinny, isn't it better that I should tell you everything, as I do and always mean to do? I don't care a bit for Mr. Burns when you are with me; but, when you are away and mamma is absorbed in the Hunters—well, then it is a relief to go to the British Museum and talk to some one who tries to please and amuse me."

"Yes, it is hard for you, Elsie, I know; but, if I can exist without admirers, I don't see why you should not."

"You are not like me, you know. When any one thinks you pretty, you delight in keeping him several miles off on the other side of a brick wall. I've no doubt it is more dignified. But I can't help wanting people to like me; and really I don't think I am ever quite happy unless I am a little bit in love with somebody."

Expostulation from me, mocking laughter from Elsie, melting on my side, apology on hers—as usual.

Our mother had been away three weeks, when one afternoon we got a letter from her which destroyed our light-heartedness at a blow.

"My darlings," it began, and after a page about the beauties of Boulogne, it went on—"I am going to tell you something which will be a great surprise to you both. Mr. and Mrs. Hunter have met some friends of theirs here, named Milman—very nice people and very highly cultivated—I am sure Guinevere would appreciate them; and, after hearing me sing, they said what a pity it was such a voice as mine should be wasted. Well, we talked it over, and the Hunters both said the same; and the end of it was that they introduced me to a gentleman staying here, a Signor Parotti, a splendid musician, who goes about giving concerts with his wife and two or three more. They happened to be in want of a contralto voice, and at last they persuaded me to try public singing. By the time you receive this I shall have made my *début*, of course under an assumed name, and in a few days we are going on to Trouville. Fancy your

old mother making her *début*! Mind you wish me plenty of applause. I felt it to be a duty not to neglect such an opportunity of earning a little money. I can not bear to be a useless mouth while my darlings are toiling so hard."

I put down the letter indignantly.

"If she really cared for 'her darlings,' she would know that they would rather sell matches than have their mother perform with a troupe of fifth-rate singing people!"

"Go on reading, Guinny; I can't understand it. Is she going to leave me here all alone with this house on my hands?"

I read through some more comments and laments, and then—

"I think my poor little Elsie would be much happier and more comfortable if she had a resident engagement; the constant running backward and forward from pupils to Museum, and the irregular meals, not so good as I should like to afford my children, are very unwholesome. I shall give up the house after this quarter, when I shall return to England to see about it."

This was the substance of the letter, which ended with more loving messages and encouragement to hope for brighter times. I was passionately indignant and I am afraid my comments were not dutiful. Elsie cried—

"You know, Guinevere, I dare say people would call it plucky and spirited of her; but I do think it very unkind to throw me over in that way, for I have tried so hard to be a good daughter to her."

"My dear Elsie, you must not judge these high-spirited and enterprising parents of ours by the standard of ordinary mortals. They are so fully occupied with the splendid sacrifices they make in order to procure us a 'future' that they don't notice how very uncomfortable they make our 'present.'"

"Guinny, I wish you would not be so bitter. You let these things eat into you so."

"I can't help it. I hate this high talking and this mean acting. For it is mean and selfish of them to cast us off like this 'for our good'; and we can't be blind to it just because we are their chil-

dren, and therefore the chief sufferers. You know, Elsie, I don't think that parents ought to sacrifice everything for their children any more than children for their parents; but, if they would only tell us plainly that they mean to go their own way regardless of us, we should be better prepared for what we have to expect."

Elsie did not answer at once—she went on crying; but presently she dried her eyes.

"It is of no use railing, though one can't help it just at first. I suppose, after all, she does not think it unkind; and the idea of the excitement pleased her, and she likes admiration and applause. So it is all only natural."

"So much the worse for nature," said I harshly.

But Elsie was not going to grieve any more. Presently she said, laughing—

"What a pity it is our invalid is young, and not old and gray-headed! He might have waked up to pity us, and be a father to us!"

"Thank you—I don't think I want to try any more fathers," said I.

So now Elsie also had to look out for a new engagement as resident governess in London.

It is dreary work this situation-hunting. My sister came in one day, after two unsuccessful interviews procured by an agent, sat down on a footstool at my feet and buried her head in my lap.

"I suppose, if I were in better spirits, I should laugh at the interviews I have had to-day," said she, looking up at me sadly; "but I can not. 'My first' was a lady of so much finer clay than I that she looked at somebody else all the time she was speaking to me. 'My second' was the wife of a shop-keeper in Jermyn Street. For some ignoble reason or other I made up my mind not to teach there as soon as I saw it was a shop; but I went in for fun. I saw a meek little lady, who dropped her 'h's' and was very 'umble. Like Fag in *The Rivals*, who kicks the kitchen-boy because his master has kicked him, I revenged myself on 'my first' by my haughty treatment of 'my second,' whom I left convinced that I taught for pleasure. Pleasure!" She paused, and presently went on very sadly: "Do you know, Guinny, I can not help feeling something

very like despair? I feel that I shall never get out of the slough of teaching."

"Don't. You must not feel that, my darling. Remember how young and how clever you are. You will be a successful artist some day; but you must go through the 'prentice-years and the wander-years first, you know."

"But don't you see that I shall not be able to study now that I have to live with a family? I shall feel caged up after having been free to do just as I like. It seems to me that, if I once put the yoke on my neck, I shall never be able to shake it off, that I shall lose all spirit as the years go by, and just sink into a mere governess-hack, like the hundreds one knows and meets every day. Don't you understand?"

I understood well enough. In spite of the kindness with which I had been treated, I had sometimes felt just the same dread of the restless pilgrimage of drudgery which would end in the sullen content of hopelessness; but faith in my youth and my luck had always come back to me—and it would come back to Elsie, I knew. But I did not like to hear her talk so, and I did my best to comfort and cheer her.

"I met Mr. Burns in the 'Underground,'" she said presently, "and even he noticed that I was looking downcast; and he said that it hurt him, and that he would give anything in the world to see me happy again."

This did not please me at all; an awful vision of dingy little Mr. Burns as a brother-in-law rose up to torment me.

"How could you let him say such things, Elsie? He will be asking you to marry him next!"

"He would if he dared."

"Elsie," cried I, in despair, "you surely could never marry a man with such nails?"

"Don't be alarmed. I certainly should not think of marrying him, whatever his nails may be like. But I can not help feeling touched when I see that a man loves me, a clever, honest little man too, and quite as well-bred, in his fashion, as any man I know. I am not like you. You would have given him a cold stare, and wondered at his amazing impertinence, I know."

I was silent for a few minutes; and then I said, in a low tone:

"Elsie, you misjudge me a little, and so you think I don't understand you. It is a family fiction that I am as cold as a statue, just because I do not 'fall in love,' as it is called, with everybody I meet."

"As I do, you mean. No, you are not cold; but you have a well-regulated mind, and a heart entirely under your own control. Instead of frittering away your affections on unfortunate little artists with nothing a year, you will reserve your smiles until some bald middle-aged millionaire makes his appearance with—"

"Yes, yes—sell myself, of course! Why do you say these things, when you must know in your heart that they are no more true of me than of you, and that they hurt me? It is true that I would not marry a very poor man, because I know, and you know, that to do so would be misery; and I know better than to believe in the all-in-all-to-each-other theory. I know that I am more likely to be happy single than married; yet I should like—to be—loved—"

Ashamed of my last sentence, I broke off with a laugh, which deceived Elsie; she did not think I was in earnest, and the moment after I was glad of it.

We were still sitting in the twilight, when we heard footsteps at the door and a ring at the bell.

"James!" we cried both together, not in welcoming tones; and I got up and shut the folding-doors to conceal our invalid; and yet, as I did so, a conviction of the uselessness of the action struck me. My brother had developed unexpectedly during the last three years, and his distinguishing quality now was a rather unpleasant sharpness; he was in the office of a solicitor noted for his ability and unscrupulousness, and James was "getting on."

He opened the sitting-room door, advanced, and kissed us affectionately; when he remembered the fact of our existence, James was very fond and proud of us. He was in evening-dress, and was looking very well. He was small, fair, with fine aquiline features and little white hands, of which he was proud.

"Where are you going, my pretty lad?" asked Elsie.

"Going to the opera, ma'am," he said. "The governor gave me

a polite note of invitation from madam this morning. The fact is, madam's daughters are glad to get your nice little brother to hold their opera-glasses and fans and to 'behave pretty' to them."

"You conceited boy! I dare say they won't even look at you."

"I wish they wouldn't. Medusa, the eldest—she was christened 'Olivia,' by mistake—has taken a fancy to me because I am such a sharp lad. So she puts up her eye-glass and stares at me, and I hear her bawling out to some friend or other that little Verney is a great pet of hers. And she thinks it is the freedom of good breeding."

"What a horrid woman!" cried Elsie.

"Yes, she is not exactly what you would call nice. But she is rich, you see; so all the youth that would be golden if it could is at her feet, and I among the throng."

"Oh, James, surely you would not marry her?"

"My sagacious and lovely Elsie, you are right. I would not; though half the needy young men in London would say it was a case of sour grapes, and the other half would call me a fool. But, for all my appreciation of wealth, I own I should think it an act of deplorable folly to tie myself to a woman like that for the sake of a few thousands that, sooner or later, I shall get without her."

"You have plenty of modest self-confidence, my dear brother," said I.

"Yes, I believe I have," said he, bowing. "Where's mamma?"

We paused. Then Elsie said slowly—

"We have not the slightest idea."

"Don't mount the tripod, or you will upset my nerves, and Medusa will bowl me over at a glance."

"I really mean what I say. Read this; we got it yesterday;" and she took our mother's letter out of her desk and gave it to him.

He read it through quite calmly, while we sat with our eyes fixed on him to watch its effect; and then he looked at us.

"I see you expect me to destroy my only dress-coat by flinging my arms about violently and gasping for air. I am sorry to disappoint you; but the fact is, I am scarcely even surprised. And you

may be as indignant with me as you please; but I rather admire her for it. Fancy her having the nerve to brave Guinevere's disgust!"

"And to whistle off poor Elsie and leave her without a home!" added I, impatiently.

"I should think, on the whole, 'poor Elsie' must be glad to be out of it. She must have known it could not go on for ever. You may think yourselves lucky that it is only concert-singing in France; if she had staid here much longer it might have been tight-rope dancing in England."

"James, I should not have thought it possible that a man could talk so of his mother!"

"But I mean nothing but what is complimentary. I think she has more spirit than any woman I know—even than you. What does surprise me is to see so much indignation in Elsie, who once, I believe, talked of—may I say it?—going on the stage."

"That was a very different thing," began Elsie, quickly. "I was obliged to earn my own living, and I naturally thought of the thing I believed, and still believe, I could do best. But I gave it up directly when you all opposed it, and took to a profession I detest—and you know best whether it was simply weakness which made me give way."

"Heaven forbid that I should name 'weakness' in the same breath with my Amazonian sisters!" said he, with mock terror. "Well, I must be going; I shall take the train at Earl's Court. Why don't you open the folding-doors? I thought you always had them open in summer-time."

"Yes, we do generally," said I carelessly.

"Well, let us open them now;" and he stepped forward.

Elsie ran and caught the handle.

"Stay; I think we have a little surprise even for you. We did not mean to 'upset your nerves' by telling you; but, as you are a prying, inquisitive person, without even the politeness to say, 'I hope I don't intrude,' we will be as open as the day."

"Why, what have you got in there? Six young ladies hung up by the hair?"

"Come and see, and don't make a noise."

She opened the door and went in. He followed, and I came last, whispering "Hush!"

The gas was low, but not too low for the invalid to be plainly seen. He was lying with his white face turned a little to the wall, as placidly as ever. For once James was unmistakably surprised. He looked from the bed to us and exclaimed—

"Guinevere—Elsie—what the—"

Then, stopping short in his speech, he went forward to examine our strange guest more closely. No sooner had he bent over him than he started back, crying—

"By Jove, it's young Barach!"

And I fancied I saw the color come into the white face on the pillow; but in the dim light I could not be sure. We dragged James back into the sitting-room, and shut the doors again.

"Who is he?" "How did he come here?" we asked each other sharply.

"Never mind who he is yet; how did he come here?" repeated James impatiently.

"Come down-stairs and we will tell you," said I, struck by a new fear of being overheard.

We told him the story as shortly as we could.

"By Jove! Talk of mamma being rash! You must be mad. What will people think of you?"

"Who are 'people'? We have hardly any friends, and they know us too well to think ill of us. Nobody else need know that we have been guilty of the crime of saving a man's life."

"But people will know. Young Barach, too!"

"Who is 'young Barach'?"

"Why, the Barach, the only Barach, the man who has put all the city in a ferment, the man whom all London is talking about, the man who tried to set the Thames on fire, and failed."

"Will you leave off talking parables, and explain? We know nothing of the talk of 'all London' or the city. What has he done? Is he a thief, or a madman, or what?"

"He has been called both, and a good many other names besides. He is a son of Sir Gordon Barach, the member for Charlton. His father put him with Burton Payne, on the Stock Exchange,

to keep him out of mischief. But, instead of chaffing the junior clerks, drawing caricatures on the office blotting-paper, and drinking the office sherry with the governor, as a well-connected young man has every right to do, he took it into his head to work. Burton Payne, a weak, shilly-shally sort of fellow, who keeps going by having a dip into everything and shuffling out at the right moment, happened to have some papers upon a French irrigation project—a great unwieldy concern, never likely to pay, in my opinion. Well, young Barach found these papers, and an evil spirit put it into his head to read them; and another, worse than the first, persuaded him to go into the subject thoroughly. He did so; the thing took his fancy; he got leave of absence from Burton Payne, who was glad to be rid of him I should think, and off he went to the south of France to get a practical knowledge of the thing. He took with him a crack engineer from Paris to whom the thing was new—mark his 'cuteness; and then, after talking to peasants, proprietors, and Heaven knows who, and making himself pretty well master of the subject—then he sends for the French engineers, promoters, etc., who are interested in the matter, and hears what they have to say. All this on his own account, mind. He must be badly off for ways of spending his pocket-money!

“Well, then back he came to London. Burton Payne had forgotten all about the Crau and the Durance and the Bouches du Rhône and Barach himself by this time. But our young speculator fastened on him like an octopus. Payne found himself for the first time forced to go into a subject. He is a weak sort of man, as I told you, and your interesting invalid has the most persuasive tongue in the world; he is so ponderously in earnest. Well, Barach persuaded him to throw himself into this project in a manner quite contrary to his usual cat's-paw tactics. The young one did everything, wrote first-rate prospectuses, and believed himself all he said in them.

“At first the thing looked well. Barach's fire and steadiness carried all before them. A company was formed; shares at a premium. But there was one great obstacle—Burton Payne himself. No one trusted him; and, you see, he was the ostensible mover of the thing, though it was pretty well known who pulled the strings.

But this clever young Barach is only a lad, without any influence in the city. The Stock Exchange wouldn't take the thing up; the shares fell; it was evident that it wouldn't work. Burton Payne was delighted to shuffle out of it; but the failure nearly drove Barach mad. Meeting after meeting was held, and at last shareholders received their money back. Burton Payne looked glum over that part of the business. Barach stood with his face as white as a sheet; somebody tried to chaff him. He looked up and said between his teeth, as if he did not know he was speaking aloud, 'I'll do it yet, in spite of the whole—Stock Exchange!'

"I was there—can't tell you what a sensation it made. He left the room at once, of course, and then there was a hubbub. There were bets made, and, little as I think of the scheme, I should be inclined to back him. It is not the horse so much that I like, but the jockey looks like going. I beg your pardon, ladies, for the slang. At any rate, he has got a name for pluck and dash that will be useful to him. And then suddenly he disappeared. We heard he was abroad. And now he turns up—here! It takes my breath away."

"When you have got your breath back, I want you to make us a promise," said I.

"Well, what is it?"

"Only not to say a word about this to any one, and not to come here again for a fortnight. In the mean time we will send him away. You have taken a weight off our minds by letting us know what sort of man we have to deal with. He is a brave fellow, and worthy of all the care we can give him."

"You need not ask me to hold my tongue. I am not quite a fool. I will be back in a fortnight to hear how you have managed. And now I must be off as fast as I can; I am late already. Good-by, you plucky mad little creatures; you have surprised me for once, I confess!"

And so he went.

That night Elsie and I lay awake talking of the invalid and his strange story; and, when we were at last silent, we lay awake still, thinking of him. Were "hero" and "City-man" really not incompatible terms?

CHAPTER III.

THE next day Elsie went to draw at the British Museum. I walked part of the way with her, and reached home at about four o'clock. On opening the sitting-room door, I was startled to see our invalid sitting on the sofa. He rose and came quickly toward me, holding out his hand. His face was lit up by such a strong expression of passionate gratitude that my eyes fell. He began to speak of thanks, stammered, and broke down.

"Pray sit down; I don't think you can be very strong yet," said I.

"I shall never be strong enough to thank you."

"And, after all, my sister and I have no right to any thanks, but must pass them on to Maynard, our servant, and a nurse, who took care of you between them," said I. I was anxious to lessen his sense of obligation, and to put our rash hospitality in the light of a matter of course; besides, the apparent suddenness of his recovery had roused suspicion in me. "Maynard tells me the doctor called while I was out. Was he not surprised to find you so much better?"

"Yes. He said I might get up. So I did; and Mrs. Maynard taught me to walk again, for at first I felt rather unsteady."

"Yes; and I don't think I ought to tire you so much with talking at first. Perhaps, if I pull down the blinds and leave you a little while, you will go to sleep."

"No, please don't, or you will make me feel that I am in the way. Won't you—practice?"

Then he knew that this was my usual practicing hour! He answered my thoughts.

"Your music has given me the sweetest of dreams lately, and I should like to dream again, if you will not let my presence disturb you."

So I played softly, without much attempt at effect beyond such expression as comes by itself, the *andante* movements in Mozart's Fantasia-Sonata in A. And, when I glanced at my quiet patient to

see if he was asleep, I always found his grave dark eyes fixed upon me. Not caring to play longer under this consciousness, I got up when the piece was finished, feeling that the blood had risen to my cheeks. He answered my thoughts again.

"I am afraid I have offended you by my rude stare. But I have been struck by a resemblance in you to another lady I know, the lady to whom I am engaged, and I have been trying to find out where it lies. Please accept my apology. You have been playing soft music, as most suitable to an invalid's ears; will you now play something stirring, to remind me that I must leave Capua?"

So I was playing the last notes of Wollenhaupt's *Marche Militaire* when Elsie came in.

Maynard had met her at the door and prepared her for the sight of our patient. She greeted him more kindly than I had done, arranged the sofa-cushions for him, and, when tea was brought in, she poured him out an invalid's cup, very weak, which he meekly asked if he might leave. We all laughed, and were at our ease. Still we felt a little shy of explanations, and kept up a feigned ignorance of each other's names; but we showed him Elsie's drawings, and we tried to find out the French puzzles in the "World" together, and enjoyed our evening, and found each other "nice." But he was watching for another opportunity to thank us; presently he turned to Elsie, saying—

"Your sister will not allow me to be grateful——"

But she interrupted him.

"Neither will I. I am a weak-minded person, and copy my sister in everything."

"But I think you must let me speak. Remember, it is no slight thing you have done for me. I don't think there are in all England two other ladies who would have been so utterly generous"—his voice grew unsteady here, and he stopped. "I can't thank you—simply I can't; it is out of the question. I might thank you for a cup of tea, for a dance, but for saving my life at the risk of ——"

He got up, walked to the mantel-piece, and stood with his back to us, his broad shoulders heaving and his head down. The tears started to our eyes; we had never seen a man moved like this before.

I left my chair and walked toward him; my voice was not very steady either.

"If you knew how glad we are to have been able to do you any good, you would be glad too, I am sure," I said slowly. "We were afraid that, when you got well, you would think our conduct strange in such young women. But we have had to live independently, and so we feel more free to do a plain duty than most girls are. I think you have understood this; and so, instead of a stranger, it seems to me that we have been harboring a friend."

He turned round quickly.

"Before Heaven, you have indeed! I won't make any protestations—I think you believe me."

He seized my hand and Elsie's, and clasped them with a fervor which brought an answering flush of kindness to my face.

"And now," said Elsie, "you must allow your nurses to suggest that you ought not to sit up any longer on the first day of convalescence."

Indeed he was almost worn out, though it was only seven o'clock; and he soon wished us good night, and then Elsie and I went up-stairs to talk.

"I can't suggest any improvement in our hero," Elsie said; but still an invalid who could talk and walk about was a more serious matter than one who only lay still and had to be fed; and I, who was two years more advanced than Elsie toward the age of terror of "what people will say," felt uneasy.

"Do you know, Elsie, I can't help thinking the progress he has made in one day toward recovery wonderfully rapid," hazarded I, when we had put out the gas.

"I don't wonder about it," she answered, very gravely. "I am quite certain, Guinny, that for the last few days he has been—shamming!"

I started, feeling suddenly hot and stifled.

"Elsie, do you know what you are saying? If it is true, the man is the most dishonorable creature living!"

"Don't you think your accusation is rather sweeping? You might as well hear what the poor fellow has to say for himself before you load him with 'appropriate epitaphs!'"

"What can he say to excuse himself for having deliberately listened to conversations of the most private nature—that he must have known we would not for the world have held before a stranger. He must have learnt all our family affairs—"

"Well, as for that, it is about the best thing he could learn, as it justifies our conduct, and shows him what kind of girls we are. Without vanity, I may say that he must have discovered that we are women who deserve respect, and he is the last person who ought to blame us for our rashness. I did not dare suggest to you that he was not so unconscious as he seemed, though I felt nearly sure of it; but I did take care that we should say nothing that it would do any harm for him to hear."

"But he could not know that; so he is just as much to blame as if—"

"Well, we can not be sure that he was listening; I may be wrong. Let us wait until to-morrow, and perhaps he will confess before going away. It seems a silly thing to say, but you have inspired in him a profound veneration; he followed you about with his eyes with a kind of admiring awe."

"Yes, he told me I reminded him of the lady he is engaged to marry."

"Engaged? Oh!" cried Elsie; and I secretly enjoyed her disappointment.

"And, my dear Elsie," I went on, after a pause, during which I made up my mind not to abuse him any more till I had some stronger proof of his want of honor than mere suspicion, "I am afraid he won't offer us the five pounds!"

"Oh, yes he will! He will drop it into my hand at the last moment, and I shall curtsy and say, 'Thank you kindly, sir!'"

With a laugh at this brilliant exchange of wit, we said good night for the last time, and dropped into silence.

The next morning, after seeing his patient, the doctor asked to see me.

"If he satisfies you as well as he has satisfied me, you will have no reason to regret your kindness, Miss Verney," he said. "He seems as deeply conscious as a man can be of your courage and

generosity. He says his friends think he is abroad; so he is going to Dover, and then on to Homburg, or one of those places."

"Is he well enough to travel?" asked I.

"Scarcely. He will stay a day or two at an hotel in town first, and I shall accompany him to Dover. He only shows a proper delicacy in wishing to go as soon as he can."

"He must not think we want to get rid of him before he is fit to travel," said I.

"There is no fear of his thinking of you and your sister anything but what is kind, Miss Verney. He is quite well enough to stand a short drive in a hansom. I have recommended him not to get up too soon; but he will make his appearance to bid you farewell some time in the course of the day."

When the doctor had gone, Elsie and I both felt a little excited, and anxious for our invalid's appearance.

"Positively the last appearance," said Elsie, mournfully.

"Why surely you are not sorry he is going, Elsie?"

"I am not altogether sorry, nor am I by any means altogether glad," she answered, slowly.

She did not go to the Museum that day.

"I won't have another *tête-à-tête* with him, Elsie," I had said—so we were together when he came into the sitting-room.

In spite of our suspicions, we felt kindly to our patient, and, the ice having been broken the day before, we were soon in lively talk.

"I can't quite make out whether you are a stranger or an old acquaintance," said Elsie, presently. "You see, an invalid and a convalescent are not quite the same person."

"Did I confess many crimes while I was off my head?" asked he, with mock anxiety.

"Only three murders, two suicides, and a burglary."

"Oh, is that all? I did not know how far down the list I might have got. I think I had better confess the rest now I am in my right mind. May I bore you by talking about myself?"

"It will not bore us at all," said Elsie.

"I will begin by saying that my name is Eugene Barach. Perhaps you may have heard that I have distinguished myself by a lamentable failure in an undertaking I had very much at heart."

We both blushed.

"I had worked myself into a state of strong excitement, and the collapse was terrible. I went down to hide myself at my father's place in Berkshire. My elder brother was at home; and an elder brother's sympathy, when one has made a fool of oneself, is not of the tender kind. I was not in a very good temper, and I dare say made myself very objectionable; I completed my folly by quarreling with him—madness in a younger brother. A beautiful young lady who was staying there with her father, and whom I had had the bad taste to neglect in my savage sulkiness, took my part, and had the kindness to soothe my vanity and to say all sorts of nice things about my 'pluck' and my 'energy,' and to listen to my rambling boasts of what I would do 'some day.' And one day I asked her to marry me, and she accepted me, although she is a fashionable beauty and I am a younger son just dismissed from my glorious post of honorary quill-driver in a stock-broker's office."

"It was very noble of her," said Elsie, with courtesy, but without enthusiasm.

"Yes, it was," he answered quietly. "When she went back to her home—she lives in Kent—I determined to go abroad for a little while; I began to feel heavy and stupid, and I thought a change would rouse me. I put up at an hotel in town, as I had some business to do; but, finding I grew worse, I made up my mind to consult a doctor I knew, living in Redcliffe Square. I took a hansom to go to him; but, when I got to the top of this street, I felt so ill that I jumped out and dismissed the man, thinking walking would revive me. But it did not; I turned giddy, and I was staggering about in the way you remember, when I felt I could go no farther, and had to cling to the railings. In that undignified situation I had the good luck to frighten you"—and he bowed to me—"and I don't remember much clearly after getting into the house."

"Then you remember nothing until you opened your eyes yesterday morning?" said Elsie slowly.

"Not quite that. I have a real confession to make now." We were listening with an attention which must have made this speech a hard ordeal. "It is some days now since I gradually woke to a wonder and interest in my surroundings. At first, I opened my

eyes now and then, to see some one watching in the room; then I used to hear soft voices and music, and my wonder and interest grew. You know it was only natural that they should; was it not?" pleaded he. "I grew into some knowledge of you and your circumstances before I could have talked much; and I must apologize for the fact that my interest grew stronger than my discretion. For perhaps you will say I ought to have coughed and h'med as soon as I was capable of speech; but I—the fact is, I felt shy. I did not quite know how to announce myself; I felt that, as soon as I could speak, I ought to get up and go; and I knew that I could not go yet, and that I should be more of a burden to you conscious than apparently unconscious, and that, if I spoke, I should lose the voices and the music. You think my conduct inexcusable, Miss Verney—you see I know your name, and that you are the elder; but please believe that I was influenced by no wish to pry into your affairs. I don't think, after all, I heard much which you would rather have kept unknown. Although you thought me more deaf than I was, my presence still put a restraint upon you, I think, for, when your talk grew very confidential, your voices got very low, and I give you my word I didn't listen; and, if I had, I don't think I could have heard. You talked more about art and the book Miss Guinevere is reading, Carlyle's 'French Revolution,' than about anything else, until—until some letter arrived which disturbed you, I believe," said he discreetly. "And then came your brother's visit, and I felt that it was time for me to go, if I could; so yesterday, as you know, I 'discovered myself' to Maynard and afterward to you. I am afraid you, Miss Guinevere, think I have committed an unpardonable offense. In considering it, please remember what a burden you will make my deep obligation to you if you think I have been guilty of ingratitude and ill-breeding toward you and your sister."

"We don't think anything of the kind," said Elsie eagerly. "Do you know, for the last few days I half guessed that you were not quite fast asleep, though Guinevere did not. And I think myself that your reasons are good ones; indeed I knew some of them before you mentioned them."

His eyes thanked her, and then he looked again at me. I felt it

would be ungenerous to hold out longer, so I forgave him. He stayed to tea with us; we played and talked, and then he rose to go. We tried to carry off the strangeness of this parting by light small-talk. But he paid no attention to our fears that there would be a thunderstorm before long. When I gave him my hand, he held it for a moment.

"You will let me come and see you again?"

"I am afraid—I think it would be better—not. I am sure you will not think my—our refusal discourteous, knowing—all about us."

"Knowing you, I dare ask you not to put me off with common-places. I should not be human if I could bear the thought of being cut off for the rest of my life from all communication with you—and your sister, and Maynard. I have no mother or sister, or, sheltered by their protection, I could come as often as I would. I can only beg you not to stand rigidly upon etiquette just because I am alone in the world, as you are. Let me come only once before I go away; and I hope that when I return you will be no longer alone. You treated me with the devotion of sisters when I was ill; can you not look upon me as a brother now that you have brought me back to life?"

"Practically—no," said I. "We can think of you as one, but we can not treat you as one. I will speak plainly. You must not think us merely conventional when I say that we can not do so because it is never done. We can brave the risk of slander when it is an imperative duty to do so, but not a moment longer."

Then Elsie spoke.

"You must not think it is because we do not wish to see you again, Mr. Barach."

"May I not come—once?"

I hesitated; and Elsie took advantage of my weakness.

"Just once," she half whispered; and then, bolder, as I still said nothing, she repeated aloud, "Just once."

He took it as an answer, and, as if afraid we might withdraw it, shook hands with us both again, and left us.

Elsie and I did not talk much that evening; I was silent, so she had to be so too. I tried to read "*Faust*," but felt too restless; the

house seemed deserted and lonely. My repressed excitement drove me to the piano, and I remained playing on mechanically long after the music had ceased to interest me, even after Norah had gone, rather listlessly, to bed. Then, ashamed of my sullenness and of the unusual tempest of emotions I had been subject to during that evening, I set myself to read steadily until my eyes grew dim and I heard the clock strike two. Then I went noiselessly to bed. I think Elsie was awake; but she did not speak to me.

CHAPTER IV.

It was strange what a slight effect that so unusual episode in our quiet lives left upon us. We went on next day with our drawing and writing as if no young man with an interesting history and an embarrassing gratitude had ever occupied much of our time and thoughts. We hardly even spoke of him; I wondered that Elsie did not, but I did not suggest the subject myself.

One afternoon, when she was away at the Museum, and I was expecting her back, the gate creaked, and I started up with my cheeks burning. But it was not Elsie; it was Mr. Barach. I thought he looked worse than when he left us, three days before. After a few minutes' talk, I asked him, rather shyly, if he had heard any more about the irrigation company. He seemed pleased by the question.

"No. You know it is a company no longer."

"Will it ever be?" I asked rather archly.

"Why, yes, I hope so; but you must not lure me on to talk about it."

"I wish I knew how. I have heard just enough to interest without satisfying me."

And I led him on to give me an account of the project—a vast one indeed—the fertilization of the vast plain of the Crau, in South France, by means of the rich alluvial deposits of the Durance.

He told it well; I felt where lay the force of this man's influence over Burton Payne, as, excited and earnest, he compelled my inter-

est in the work he had spent his energies upon. When he had finished, he laughed quietly.

"That is all, so far."

"Then you mean to carry it through?"

"I have boasted too much already; it is the idlest of boasts in a man in my position to say 'I will' in the matter. But I shall try again some day, I hope; I am too vain to like the feeling of having failed. And I believe in it, you see; I have spent my time, my brains, my enthusiasm, all I had, upon it. In these circumstances it is natural to try again; wouldn't you?"

He did not put this as a mere formal question.

"I am not a man; I have none of the qualities needful in the carrying out of a great enterprise. Perhaps, if I had courage and steadfastness—"

"But, Miss Verney, surely you must know that, if ever man or woman had courage and steadfastness of the highest kind—"

"I have, you are going to say; and I am much obliged to you. But I have nothing but emotional courage and the steadfastness of obstinacy. This is not mock-modesty on my part, but the result of self-study, I assure you. You can scarcely know as well as I do."

"It is idle to say I know you better than you do yourself. But I never thought I should be able to understand a woman as I do you, Miss Verney," he went on, still excited. "I hope you do not think me impertinent in speaking so frankly. I seem to have learnt you by inspiration. Yet I wonder to think what an utterly wrong impression of you I should have taken, if I had met you in ordinary circumstances; I might have danced with you in ball-room after ball-room, handed you a hundred cups of tea, and known you no better than if I had lived at the North Pole and you at the South."

"What would you have thought of me then?" asked I, my curiosity and my vanity roused.

"I should have called you a sparkling little brunette, but never have thought that you could be tender and sweet, still less that you had a largeness of mind more common in men, if I may say so, than in women."

This speech had touched upon a grievance of mine.

"Setting aside the very high compliments you have paid me,

Mr. Barach, I confess that I have often felt how heavily a woman was handicapped by the accident of her physique. If a man has anything in him, he can be what he pleases, grave or gay, dignified or active, no matter whether he be tall or short; but a little dark woman must be vivacious, a tall fair one must be languid, or she has mistaken her vocation," I ended, with a laugh.

This speech was a little stiff, I knew; but I thought Mr. Barach's frankness was going too far, and I kept the conversation to generalities until Elsie came in. He did not stay much longer, and he did not ask if he might come again; but, as he held my hand to say good-by, he looked down at me with the expression in his eyes that I had feared to see there; it seemed to say, "Right or wrong, I love you!" And I lowered my own eyes lest they should answer him.

After that day I knew better than to give way to reflection or self-examination, better than to avoid Mr. Barach's name in talking to Elsie. I felt the need of action stirring up new energy in me; and I read, wrote, talked, and sought a new situation harder than ever.

Our guest had been gone ten days, and Maynard had received a very handsome present from him, when, one afternoon, as Elsie and I were sitting together, we heard a knock at the door, and an unknown voice, and then Maynard announced, "Lady Catherine Hyde."

The lady was a stranger, tall, handsome, and well dressed; she looked about twenty-five. Elsie guessed who she was at once; but I did not, and could only see that this stranger was prepared to treat us as if we were out of sight.

"I am a stranger to you," she began; "but you may, perhaps, have heard my name?"

"Never that I know of," said I quietly.

"Or you may, perhaps, have seen my portrait inside a locket hanging on the watch-chain of your late guest while he was ill?"

I looked up at her with new intelligence.

"We may have seen the locket, but it would not have occurred to us to open it," I said dryly.

She continued, with just the same tinge of insolence in her tone—

"I am engaged to Mr. Barach"—she paused, as if to watch her effect—I bowed—"and, after hearing of the service you had done him, I was anxious to see and thank you myself."

"We are really very much obliged to you," struck in Elsie, in a meek tone; "but we were quite satisfied with Mr. Barach's own thanks."

"Of course, he did all that was right in the matter of thanks and—remuneration."

"Mr. Barach felt that the service we had rendered him was not of a kind to be repaid," said Elsie. "To offer us remuneration would have been an insult."

"We are not the kind of girls to allow men to be rude with us, whatever insolence we may have to suffer from our own sex," said I quietly, with eyes flashing and cheeks glowing.

Our visitor had the grace to look ashamed of herself as she returned my full look; then she spoke in a different manner.

"I beg your pardon; I see I have made a mistake. I had thought—well, I had thought all sorts of things that are not true, and I am glad I came and learnt the truth."

"We are very much obliged to you," said Elsie again, with still more humility.

"Yes, it is your turn to be repellent now," she said; "and I am going to bear meekly anything you like to say to me, in the hope that you will be generous enough to forgive me in the end."

Her manner was now so gracious and winning that we were disarmed.

"I don't wish to say anything disagreeable to you," said Elsie, half smiling; "but I should like to know why you came to attack us?"

"I am half ashamed to tell you. When I learnt that Eugene Barach had been ill, and had been nursed devotedly by two young ladies, I naturally felt anxious to see them. I need not tell you that I was moved by no vulgar feeling of jealousy; but I must confess to the vulgar feeling of curiosity."

"I am afraid you had heard a very bad account of us," said I drily.

"No, I assure you, I had not. But I did not know—how could I know?—what you were like—"

"And you were astonished to find that we did not drop our 'h's,'" said Elsie.

"It was a very unladylike action of ours, certainly," said I.

Our visitor burst into a pretty soft laugh.

"At least I have not been guilty of the meanness of attacking people unable to defend themselves. Will you forgive me? I am not at all used to asking pardon, I assure you. But your high spirit and frankness have won me, and I want you to do me justice, as I do you."

We accepted her apology readily enough; and then, as she showed some interest in us, we told her something about our way of life.

"Then you are really almost as independent as young men?"

"Quite," said Elsie. "The only difference is that we don't smoke and don't get into mischief."

"I can not tell you how much I envy you your liberty and admire your strength of mind. It is very hard that, when a woman tries to free herself a little from the conventional restraints put upon her, she should be called 'fast.'"

"But I don't think any one, however censorious, who knew us at all, would call us fast," said Elsie gravely.

The lady laughed again.

"Why, you are not so strong-minded as I thought! What do you call 'fast?'"

"Wait a moment, please, for me to think," said Elsie. "I call 'fast' any woman who, without any necessity for it, and merely to satisfy the restlessness of an insufficiently occupied mind, draws people's attention upon herself by willful eccentricities, and says and does not what other women can not say and do, but what they will not say and do."

"Your definition is too severe," said Lady Catherine. "I should have expected broader views from you."

"Schoolmasters and mistresses are proverbially narrow-minded, you know," said Elsie.

"Ah, but you don't think the whole duty of children consists in shutting the door after them and speaking when they are spoken to!" She turned to me. "You told me that you are trying to find some more pupils?"

"Yes," said I.

"I know a lady in want of a governess for her children, and I think you would suit her admirably. She wants some one young and—and well-bred, firm enough to keep spoilt children in order, and lively enough to amuse herself when she is dull."

"I should not like that," said I, decidedly.

"But listen—for, the more I think of it, the more sure I feel that it would suit you. I will tell you faithfully the advantages and disadvantages," she went on, with good-natured eagerness. "First—the lady is a beauty, and, consequently, rather capricious; the children are spoilt through bad management, but you would have them entirely to yourself—the parents would not thwart you in any way. The gentlemen of the family, I think, you would not like, but they would not come much in your way, and the parents would give a high salary to any one they liked," she added hurriedly.

"It is very kind of you to interest yourself so much about me," said I.

"But the obligation would be on the other side. These people would be very grateful to me for introducing you to them. Will you let me?"

"I shall be very much obliged to you if you will. Do they live in town?"

"No—at Hawkstone, in Kent. Mr. Godfrey is a very great man in the city; you have heard of him, I dare say. And his wife was the celebrated beauty, Leila Fitzgerald."

"I never heard of her; but then I know very little about the fashion, in beauty or in anything else."

"Will you be ready to go down and be 'interviewed' next week? I will write to her to-night."

She was beaming with eagerness to carry out her plan, and I consented, feeling a little bewildered by the suddenness of this possible good fortune, and at the strides our acquaintance with the beautiful stranger had made during this first visit.

When she had gone, taking with her the address of my late employers, upon which I had insisted, I looked gravely at Elsie, who at first said nothing.

"You don't like her, Elsie; why not? She is beautiful, fascinating, and very kind-hearted; is she not?"

"Yes, but she is too restless and impulsive; I should not care to trust her. Do you know, I think she is just what we were talking about—'fast'?"

"I don't like to hear you say that, when she has just been behaving so kindly to me."

"Why, it is only a caprice of hers; one can see that she likes playing 'Lady Bountiful,' and prides herself on her energy."

"She has been spoilt," said I; "but she is straightforward and generous."

And Elsie said no more against her; but presently I remarked:

"Do you know, Elsie, I think Mr. Barach ought to have said more about us to Lady Catherine than he did, or nothing at all. It was right neither to her nor to us to leave the story half told."

"Why, Guinny, how simple you are! I am sure that he never said a word to her about us."

"But, my dear child, how could she have found it out?"

"I don't know; but I am certain she did. Why, do you think, if such a thing happened to the man you were engaged to, you would not find it out? I know I should. I will prove to you that he did not tell her. First of all, she was utterly surprised to find that we were ladies; Mr. Barach would not have left her in doubt about that. She was angry and jealous, in spite of all she said to the contrary; and that was because she had had to find the story out, instead of being told. And, lastly, Mr. Barach would have known better than to tell her at all."

"I think he would have done much better to tell her all; it would have been more loyal to her and kinder to us. I fancy a woman can generally tell when the man she loves is speaking the truth in such matters."

"I don't believe she does love him, any more than he loves her."

"Elsie, Elsie, you must not say that!" said I, with tingling cheeks.

"Listen, Guinevere. Was she not more astonished at our courage than grateful for our care of him? And, if she really cared for him, would not her first impulse, after hearing all about it, be to write him a nice letter about us? Instead of that, she seemed glad to hear that we had thought it best not to keep up the acquaintance; and, as she sees she need not be jealous of us, she will not let him know she has been spying out his actions."

"I don't believe all that a bit, Elsie; but it is very clever of you to make it up."

Two days later I received a note from Lady Catherine, inclosing a telegram which she had received from Mr. Godfrey. It said:

"Many thanks for letter. Please engage the lady at once. Your recommendation quite sufficient. Ask her to come Wednesday."

I gave it to Elsie in astonishment.

"They must be queer people to engage a person they have never seen on the recommendation of some one who has seen her only once.

"Of course you won't go, Guinny; there must be something wrong about them."

"Of course I shall go, though I shall not consider myself engaged to them. I shall go on Wednesday, as I am asked; and, if I don't like it, I shall come back by the next train." And I wrote to thank Lady Catherine.

Elsie had been asked, by the lady whose children she was teaching, to stay with her as resident governess, and she accepted the new lease of drudgery with many groans.

I reached Hawkstone at about one o'clock on Wednesday morning, after a walk of two miles from the nearest station.

The house stood in a park containing a tiny lake with swans on it that charmed my fancy at once. The house itself was a heavy-looking, stone-colored building, with a massive colonnade running the whole height and width of the front. From the entrance-hall one passed into a great hall the whole height of the house, of which it occupied the centre; it had doors all round, and dark, oaken

galleries above, on to which the doors of the upper story opened. At one end of this hall was a huge tiled fireplace, with a long-haired white rug in front of it, and at the other end a billiard-table. On opposite walls hung copies of two large pictures by Rubens; over the doors and fire-place were antlers, foxes' heads and brushes; and by the side of each door hung a thick curtain which could be drawn at pleasure to shut out all draughts, and shut in all noise when—but I did not find out when till later. This hall was rather sparsely furnished with solid-looking chairs made of oak and green morocco, of most tempting shapes; and there were sofas and ottomans in the corners. It was lighted by an enormous sky-light in the roof, which was, on the sunny September morning when I first visited Hawkstone, covered by a canvas awning, which made a pleasant dimness in the place.

I was shown into a morning-room. The table was covered with scraps of silk, muslin, and other materials, with cardboard, pins, gum-bottles, half-dressed dolls, and all the rubbish that charitable ladies manufacture into baits for other charitable ladies at bazaars. I was enjoying the view of the pretty park from the window, when a lady came in. I blushed for admiration as I looked at her.

She was rather tall, but slight, with golden hair and sweet, surprised gray eyes; she wore a white morning-gown, with no other ornament than a large bow of dark violet velvet at her throat, which set off her fair face and her pretty pale hair. She shook hands with me graciously, looking down into my face with the expression of an inquiring child.

"I am so sorry Lady Catherine could not come to-day, Miss Verney; you would have felt less like a stranger if she had been here."

"But I have seen her only once."

"Yes, so she says; but she took such a fancy to you that she would have liked to introduce you herself. I am sure you are thinking you never were in such an untidy house," said she, turning, smiling, to the table; "but we are working for a bazaar, and every room is full of people and penny toys. Perhaps you know of some new things to make; do you? We can not get beyond pen-wipers and pin-cushions;" and she laughed.

"I shall be very glad to help you, if I can."

"Are you too tired to give us some lessons this afternoon?" she asked.

I was surprised at this curious opening. I was prepared with an honest list of my capabilities and deficiencies, with an explanation of my method of teaching and my reason for leaving my last situation; and I had expected to take my leave after half-an-hour's more or less severe examination. And now to have my staying taken as a matter of course, and to be entreated to make dolls' clothes, was rather disconcerting. She noticed my momentary embarrassment.

"I dare say you think it is very strange that we should not ask and answer a lot of questions, and you think I am taking your remaining too much for granted. But I assure you the sight of you, after Lady Kate's account and the high reference you give, is quite sufficient for me. And I thought, if you were to pass the afternoon with us and see the children, you would be able to decide whether you would care to stay. Mr. Godfrey is coming home to luncheon on purpose to see you. The children are rather rough, I am afraid; but they have been allowed to run wild since their last governess left. The salary we offer is eighty pounds; but, if you don't think that enough—"

"It is quite enough, thank you; I have been receiving no more for teaching three grown-up girls. I think your plan is most kind; but my sister expects me back—"

"We will send a telegram to your sister to say you will not be home till later, if I may?"

I afterward found that this family never gave themselves the trouble of writing a letter when a telegram would do, and that a small groom rode constantly backward and forward between Hawkstone and the station with these messages.

When I had taken off my bonnet, Mrs. Godfrey introduced me to some ladies who were amusing themselves at the billiard-table in the hall, and to a young man who was watching them—"Mr. Tom Godfrey." He was a broad, muscular young man, with a rather abrupt manner, and a handsome, hard face. I wondered whether he was her husband's brother. He bowed slightly when Mrs. Godfrey uttered my name, but scarcely condescended to look at me. I

hoped that this gentleman was only a visitor, for I instantly decided that I should not like him.

A good-natured young lady fetched a photographic album and showed it to me, all the time addressing her looks and occasionally her conversation to the abrupt young man.

Presently I heard a deep, pleasant man's voice scolding somebody; there was a little stir among the party, and a gentleman in riding-dress, very much like Mr. Tom Godfrey, but much older, stouter, darker, and livelier, came in. He noticed me at once, and, after greeting the other ladies, came up to me.

"This is Miss Verney, I am sure," said he kindly. "I am very glad to see you. If I had only known what train you were coming by, I might have escorted you down from town, and have had an hour's advantage over all these people. Tom, take this young lady in to luncheon."

The young man came up, and offered his arm rather brusquely; and we went with the rest into the dining-room.

"I dare say you would like to sit next to Miss Falconer— Confound it, no ice again!" said he, when we got into the room; and I was not sorry that he took no further notice of me through the meal.

"Where is Hubert?" asked Mr. Godfrey.

"Mrs. Hunt said something very cruel to him, and so he has ridden off to the kennels," said Tom.

"I only told him he liked to play Orson to Tom's Valentine," said a wide-eyed lady in black and amber, laughing.

"That is a grand compliment for you, Tom," said Mr. Godfrey.

I began to find out, during the meal, that I did not care for Mr. Godfrey, although he was kind; his eyes were bold and restless, and there was a shade too much of freedom in his talk for ladies' society, I thought, though none of the other ladies seemed to think so.

The good-natured Miss Falconer informed me after luncheon that "Tom" and "Hubert" were Mr. Godfrey's sons by a former wife.

"Is Mr. Hubert Godfrey like his brother?" asked I.

"Oh no—not half so nice!" she answered decidedly. "At

least, some people may like him better; but I don't. He is very good-looking, and can be very pleasant when he pleases, only he never does please—at least he never pleases me. He is horribly lazy, doesn't care for anything but hunting and drinking, and is rough and insolent besides."

I wondered whether he could be more insolent than his brother.

Then the children came in, and Mrs. Godfrey brought them up to me.

"You see they look very meek in their clean pinafores; but they are not quite so lamb-like when they are playing by the duck-pond."

They were pretty children, with large gray eyes like their mother's; Rose was ten, and Bernard eight. They were very friendly, and took me to see the swans. They soon proved the truth of their mother's words. Bernard having trodden on an old doll of his sister's, she flew upon him, twisted her hands in his hair, and knocked his head against a tree. I remonstrated, at which Bernard seemed surprised. She looked up at me without seeming at all offended, and said simply, as if in explanation—

"Papa says I'm twice the man Bernie is. And Hubert says, if he had anything in him, he would hit me back again."

"Hubert is a brute," said Bernie gravely—not as if personally aggrieved by his half brother, but as if stating a recognized fact.

"But you shouldn't say that, dear," said I gently.

"Oh, but mamma says he is!" said Rose. "And papa says he is a hulking—I forget what; but I know it was 'hulking.'"

"And Tom says so too—everybody says so," added Bernard.

"You are very fond of Tom, are you not?" said I, cunningly putting out a feeler.

"Tom gives us chocolate sometimes," said Rose.

"But he boxes my ears," said Bernard.

I began to look upon Tom as the good villain and Hubert as the wicked villain in the "Babes in the Wood," and I wondered whether "the gentlemen of the family," concerning whom Lady Catherine had warned me, would not prove a fatal obstacle to my accepting this situation. But, as the afternoon went on, I slowly made up my mind that even the gentlemen must be dared. I liked the children,

their mother, the house, the promise of entire control over my pupils; and I could not afford to be indifferent to the offer of increased salary after a time. There was something that was distasteful to me in the tone of the household; but I knew that in a little while I could draw back unnoticed, and lead my life between my bedroom and the school-room as I chose; a fancy such as that which Mrs. Godfrey had taken to me could not last long, and, to judge from the behavior of Mr. Tom Godfrey, I had no objection to fear on the part of the gentlemen. So I decided to accept the situation.

If I could have foreseen the part I should have to play in the history of that household, should I have had the courage to stay?

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. GODFREY seemed much pleased when I told her that I should like to come, and, after arranging that I was to return the following week to stay, they sent me back to the station in a brougham. I had to get out of the train at London Bridge, walk to the Temple, and go by the underground railway to Earl's Court.

It was a little before the time when the trains are crowded with men returning from the city; but in my carriage there was already a gentleman in each corner. I did not notice any of them until they got out one after another, and there was only one left. Then, without my looking up or his speaking, it flashed upon me who he was. I raised my eyes shyly, and they met, as I felt sure that they would meet, those of Eugene Barach. He came a little nearer to me, and said, in a low voice:

"You are going away."

"How did you know it?"

"I learned it from the board up in front of your house; I did not dare to call. But you will not refuse now to tell me where you are going?"

I felt that in this acquaintance there was danger; and, with a pang that surprised and alarmed me by its sharpness, I decided that I must refuse. But to do so was difficult.

"I think, Mr. Barach, we were all wise in deciding that our strangely-made acquaintance should die a natural death," said I, with inward rage at the clumsiness of my speech.

"But I have never so decided," said he, in a low tone, in which I detected an earnestness that frightened me. "You know that I take a deep interest in your welfare and your sister's—that my interest is natural and just; you know that I will never obtrude upon you in any way; and yet you refuse me what you would, I think, give to any other friend or, if you like, acquaintance."

"I suppose you will not deny our right to give or refuse our address to whom we please, Mr. Barach."

He paused for a moment, and then said hotly:

"You do not trust me, Miss Verney; but at least you shall understand me. You will take what I am going to say for a deliberate insult, I am afraid; and yet Heaven knows I reverence you more than any living woman. I love you—please listen. You must have known it; and I wish to justify myself in your eyes, if I can."

"I must listen to just so much of your justification," said I, with a sneering emphasis on the word, "as you can say before we get to the next station, when either you or I will leave the carriage, Mr. Barach."

"Very well," said he. "I fell in love with you, being already engaged to a beautiful and generous woman. I did not know my danger till I could not escape it; and, upon my honor, I do not believe I could have avoided it. What can a man do, when he meets his ideal, but love her, whatever be his engagements? Don't think that I mean he should slink out of them, or give half faith where he is bound to give whole loyalty. I will tell the truth to the woman I marry, whoever she may be, as truly as I am doing to you, Miss Verney; and by that time it shall not hurt her to know it. I am not going to sit down and nurse my weakness. But it is not all a weakness, and therefore I ask you to trust me. If I could have been so foolish and infatuated as to fall passionately in love with a mere lovely face, I would have crushed the fancy by avoiding the face; but I am in no such case. The love I feel for you is founded on the very strongest respect, esteem, and something more. The

thought of your having to fight your way alone in the world, brave as you are, and not only you, but your sister too, has made me shudder over and over again. I know that there are very few ways in which a man can help a lonely girl, but there are some. Circumstances having made me in some way acquainted with your affairs, you could appeal to me with confidence. You may think that impossible after the confession I have just made to you; but I think that, after a little reflection, you will trust me better, now that I have told you the plain truth, than if I had urged you to give me your confidence with lies and half-truths. I swear to you that I will never say a word of this to you again, unless——” He stopped, and went on again hurriedly—“I swear that I will try with all my strength to forget you just so much as to leave me nothing but your very sincerest friend.”

I leaned back trembling. I had not got out at the next station, as I had threatened. His earnestness had had its effect upon me; but I was not so much carried away by it as not to see that his “justification” left him in the wrong.

“I think you have scarcely given the most delicate proof of your friendship, Mr. Barach.”

I hardly knew how cutting my words were until I saw their effect upon him. He turned away with bent head, the bitterest mortification I had ever seen on his face. My heart leaped up, as I felt that he was reproaching himself with ingratitude to me, and a passionate longing to comfort him woke within me. We were silent for a few minutes; we were near Earl’s Court now, I knew; would he let me go without another word? Could I do it? But he turned to me again.

“I can not ask you again to let me have your address; will you, if you do not think me an utter ruffian, let me give you mine?”

“I will take it if you like. But I would rather die than——”

He interrupted me quickly.

“Have mercy. I hope from my soul that you may never be in need of a friend; as long as I live, even if I never see you again, you will never be without one.”

He took out a card, scribbled his London address on it, and gave it to me. The train was stopping: I had bowed and risen to get

out; a better impulse than the proud one which urged me to leave him without another word made me turn quickly and hold out my hand. In an instant he was passionately kissing my wrist.

"Heaven bless you!"

And I said gently "Good-by;" and the minute after I was on the platform, and the train was carrying him away.

I felt that the excitement of preparing for my departure for Hawkstone was a good thing for me, to counteract the more dangerous excitement of that meeting in the train. Elsie was much interested in my account of the household, and amused herself by making up absurd stories about them.

"Lifting the veil off the future, Guinny, listen. On a sunny afternoon in early spring a light tap will be heard at the school-room door. My dignified sister, without looking up from the exercise she will be correcting, will say, 'Come in.' Enter a young man—I will not disclose whether it will be Valentine or Orson—with a glove in his hand, from which he has, of malice prepense,renched the button. He is very sorry to trouble Miss Verney. Will Miss Verney have the kindness to sew it on for him? Miss Verney takes the glove, replies frigidly that she will, and adds that he will send it to him, when finished, by his little sister. Exit young man, trembling and abashed; and never more they saw the man returning to the school-room. There is the making of a romance in that household, Guinny—whole cupboardfuls of skeletons which your overstrained notions of honor will forbid you to tell me about; but at least I shall expect a full, true, and particular account of Orson."

The next week Elsie and I bade good-by to our home and to each other, and, feeling very sad and lonely, I started for Hawkstone. Mrs. Godfrey had promised to send a carriage to meet me at the station; but when I got there I saw only a smart-looking mail-phaeton waiting; and, not thinking it likely that that had been sent for me, I decided to walk on. As I gave an admiring look at the pair of handsome bays, who were rather restive, I noticed a young man jump into the phaeton and take the reins from the groom. The groom looked at me, and said a few words to his master, who answered—

"Go on then, and look sharp."

The man came up to me and touched his hat.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but Mrs. Godfrey has sent the carriage for you, and young Mr. Godfrey will drive you."

But I had recognized in "young Mr. Godfrey" a man who had annoyed me by staring rudely at me while I was waiting to take my ticket at London Bridge.

"Please tell Mr. Godfrey that I thank him, but prefer to walk."

The groom went back while I walked on; but in a minute more I heard the phaeton close behind, and the young man sprang out and came up to me.

"Miss Verney, I believe?" I bowed.

"Mrs. Godfrey will be very much annoyed to hear that you walked when she sent the carriage on purpose to meet you, and commissioned me to drive you. You need not be afraid of the horses running away; I'm used to them, I assure you."

"Thank you, but I am not. Mrs. Godfrey will pardon my nervous fears, and I really prefer to walk"—glancing up into his handsome, insolent face with a strong determination that nothing should induce me to trust myself with him, however good a whip he might be.

He looked much annoyed, bowed without speaking, jumped up into the phaeton, and drove off, while I walked on quietly, indignant with Mrs. Godfrey for sending him, and with himself for his bold, brusque manners.

When I arrived, I was told that Mrs. Godfrey was out, but was expected home soon, and in the mean time tea was ready for me in the morning-room. While I was despondently eating bread and butter, I heard a man's step in the large hall; the door was not quite closed, and presently the scent of a cigar came in. A few minutes afterward I heard a carriage drive up, another man's step in the hall, and then Mr. Tom Godfrey's voice; he was the smoker apparently, for he spoke in jerks—I suppose between the puffs of his cigar.

"Well, how did you get on with Becky Sharp? You must have found her fascinating enough to bring her round by the longest way; I know by the time the train was due."

"I didn't bring her at all. I've been to Blake's," said the surly voice of the driver of the mail-phaeton.

"Ah, then you thought Mrs. Godfrey's description of her charms overdrawn! I forgot that you only promised to bring her if she found favor in your eyes."

"She wouldn't come—said primly she preferred to walk. She was afraid of the horses," said he, with a sneer.

"Afraid of the driver, more likely, Hubert! The delicate fascination of your manner alarmed her. Or perhaps she is romantic, and expected you to carry her off by force."

"I should have liked to take her as far as the common, and rattle down the hill as the bays can go, and shake a little of the confounded primness out of her," said he savagely. "I will some day. I'll be like a lamb for a week, and induce her to trust her precious little person to me and the bays, just for a quarter of an hour, to please the children. I'll pack them in behind with Wilson."

While his brother was laughing at this kind speech, another carriage drove up.

"There is Delilah, I expect. Now for a storm! She will think I've insulted her new *protégée*, as she wouldn't come with me. Give me a light."

At the moment of Mrs. Godfrey's entrance into the hall I quietly shut the door; I had not dared to do so before, but had had to hear, indignant, disgusted, and yet a little amused, the conversation of these hateful brothers.

The next day I wrote to Elsie, giving an account of my arrival, and I did not forget my promised description of "Orson."

"His elder brother is courteous and pleasant compared to Mr. Hubert Godfrey, as you may judge by what I have told you. Mrs. Godfrey insisted upon my dining with them all yesterday evening, and Mr. Hubert stared at me, as if I had been a statue recently unearthed, the whole time. Afterward I played the accompaniment to a song for Mrs. Godfrey, who then, seeing I was tired, let me escape before the gentlemen came in. She asked me if I could be down by a quarter to nine o'clock; and when I said 'Oh, yes,' she asked me if I would mind pouring out the coffee for the gentlemen

in the morning, as I was the only lady whom she could depend upon to be down in time. Of course I agreed, though I did not like it at all; and this morning I arrived punctually in the breakfast-room, where I found Rosie and Bernie waiting. They said they always had their breakfast first, before any one else came down; so I parted them over their bread and milk, and waited, wondering whether the rest would come down in a crowd when they did arrive, or drop in one at a time all through the morning.

"At twenty-five minutes past nine Mr. Godfrey came in in a great hurry, ate fish and grilled bones with one corner of the 'Times' in his plate, looking up kindly every now and then with a remark about what he was reading, and then rushed off with the 'Daily News' and 'Telegraph,' and jumped into the dog-cart that was waiting to take him to the station. Ten minutes later Mr. Tom Godfrey came in, ate his breakfast with as much deliberation as his father had shown impatience, and without a glance at the paper. Presently I asked—

"Do you know whether the other gentlemen are likely to come down soon?"

"If you are waiting for them, Miss Verney, I should advise you to find some amusement for the time. They are sure not to be down before eleven, and my brother, at least, won't want coffee, but soda-water."

"You may imagine I did not stay to undo their soda-water, but went to the school-room. This is a very pretty room, looking on to a lawn which runs right up under the window; it has two doors, one of which leads into another room, into which, however, I have not yet ventured to peep.

"The children and I dined when the rest had luncheon, and afterward Mrs. Godfrey made me play at lawn-tennis. I shall certainly not have to complain of over-work here, but rather of over-play."

I soon gave up waiting for any one in the morning but Mr. Godfrey, whom I could not help liking, because he had always a smiling "good morning" for me, though he too sometimes took soda-water instead of coffee. For, before I had been there a fortnight, I

discovered a "skeleton" which appalled me, and then I kept out of the way of the gentlemen as much as I could, although I found that the younger son could be pleasant and amusing when he liked, and Mr. Tom Godfrey, on the two or three days in the week when he went to the city early instead of his father, molested me no more than before. Sometimes one or other of them would spend the night in town. There were generally visitors staying in the house, and most of the gentlemen and some of the ladies were "horsy"; the two topics that never failed to interest at the luncheon-table were the odds on race-horses and the hunting prospects for the coming winter.

When the children had gone to bed, I used to sit reading in the school-room until my supper was brought in, and, after that, as I had to cross the hall to get up-stairs, I used to hasten to my room as quickly as I could, to avoid meeting the people coming out from the dining-room.

One night, when Mr. Godfrey was away, as I was lazily brushing my hair, I heard a knock at my door, and Mrs. Godfrey's voice—"Miss Verney, are you in bed?"

I had never seen her look so pretty as she did when I opened the door and she came in, in her white dressing-gown, with her pretty fair hair loose upon her shoulders.

"Do you mind if I keep you up a little while? I want you to talk to me; I am so dull."

But she did not want me to talk, but to listen; and when she left me my eyes were full of tears of compassion for her and indignation against her husband and his two eldest sons.

After that she often sent for me at night to her room, and my sympathy was most heartfelt, until the very force of it led to my asking myself if there were really nothing to be said on the other side. For I had to listen to confidences that made me shudder.

"I was only a girl, Miss Verney, when my mother persuaded me to marry Mr. Godfrey. I dare say I did not want much persuasion; I had had my head turned by the flattery of half London, and I was not experienced enough to choose wisely for myself. He told me he loved me passionately; my mother knew that he was rich and held a good position in the world. Perhaps she did not

know all about him; at any rate, I did not. I was married before I was nineteen, and at first I was happy enough; my husband was kind, I did what I liked, and then I had my children. Tom and Hubert were at school, and afterward at college. I don't know why it was that they never liked me; I am sure I tried to please them whenever they came home. They both led fast lives at Oxford; they were shamefully extravagant, and Mr. Godfrey had to pay their debts over and over again. I have never been happy since they came home. They never agreed about anything else, but they joined in doing all they could to hurt and vex me. Mr. Godfrey grew sullen and jealous; then he drank more than before; and I found out that before I married him he had had—I can scarcely tell you, Miss Verney—*delirium tremens*. Tom and Hubert drank too, as you know they do now. Hubert ought to be in an establishment for dipsomaniacs. While I was distracted by these horrible troubles, I found out that the first Mrs. Godfrey had died in a lunatic asylum, mad through the mania which has descended as a curse upon her children."

"Oh, Mrs. Godfrey, is it possible? How terrible for them!"

"How terrible for me, Miss Verney! They themselves don't seem to care; they don't even try to cure themselves, like men; Hubert is as weak and untrustworthy as a child. I have done what I could, and tried over and over again to get him into one of those establishments for curing people. But he is utterly without gratitude, and is always trying to poison Mr. Godfrey's mind against me. You must have noticed how he sneers at what I say, in that open ingenuous manner he puts on when he likes."

I had thought I noticed that sometimes, but even more in Tom than in Hubert; but I did not say so. She went on—

"People think I ought to be very happy just because I am rich; but indeed, Miss Verney, I would rather live in a little cottage, and wash up the dishes and sweep the floors for some one who loved me faithfully and was always kind and tender, than live the miserable life I lead now."

And as she raised her eyes to mine she looked so sweet and sad that I fell upon my knees and kissed her hand; and she gently stroked my head and seemed pleased.

But, when I went back to my own room, with the spell of her beautiful presence broken, my thoughts turned to Hubert and Tom, with even more of smarting pity for them than I had felt for her. It was pity, mixed with contempt indeed, at the thought that these two strong young men could yield themselves up, apparently without a struggle, to what they must know would be their ruin. But when I thought of the household in which they had been brought up, of the society they had lived among, of the temptation, and, above all, of the fearful inheritance they were born to, my contempt grew weak before my passionate pity and longing to stretch out a hand to save them. A scene which occurred only three nights after this impressed me more strongly still.

I had now been five weeks in the house, and the hunting season had begun. Mr. Godfrey was away in Leicestershire, his sons contenting themselves for the present with a run with the "Old Surrey" pack two or three times a week. By this time Mr. Hubert had given up his rude staring at me, and made attempts to amuse me, which I received rather frigidly. There were no visitors in the house. One night, when they had both had a long run with the hounds, Mrs. Godfrey, as usual when alone with them, went early to her room, and kept me there until about half-past eleven. She said she could not sleep; she must have a book. There was a fresh set from Mudie's in the drawing-room; would I go down and choose her one?

When I went out of the room, I could see from the gallery the two gentlemen in the hall, both smoking, the elder in an easy chair, the younger lounging against the mantel-piece. My heart leaped up to my mouth; I should not like to pass them then, I felt. But to turn back and tell Mrs. Godfrey the reason would draw down a long tirade against her stepsons, and I resolved not to face them, but to slip through the hall and back again, while they, probably half asleep, would scarcely notice me. They did see me, but said nothing; and I went into the drawing-room and deliberately chose a novel out of the pile, and opened the door to go back, feeling a good deal calmer than when I started. But terror seized me when I saw that Mr. Tom had wheeled his easy-chair to within a few feet of the doorway, and was leaning over the back, looking half insolent, half amused.

"You are afraid of me, Miss Verney, aren't you?"

This taunt called back my courage; I looked steadily into his face and answered:

"No, not in the least."

His look changed at once; but, before he could move, Mr. Hubert sprang across from the mantel-piece, and with one strong push sent his brother, chair and all, flying off several yards, leaving my passage clear.

I did not stay to hear the angry words which followed. I did not run until I got to the staircase; but then I flew up and straight to my own room, forgetting all about the book I still carried, which Mrs. Godfrey's maid had to come and fetch. And I made up my mind, amid my sobs, that I would not stay at Hawkstone any longer.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning I would not stay to pour out Mr. Tom Godfrey's coffee, but went into the school-room when the children and I had had our breakfast, while they had their usual half-hour's play in the garden. I heard Mr. Tom come down-stairs, go into the breakfast-room, come out again, cross the hall, come straight to the school-room door, and knock.

"Come in," said I.

He came in and held out his hand; but I only bowed, with an icy "Good-morning."

"Miss Verney, I have come to apologize for my behaviour last night. I am afraid I was not quite—answerable for my actions; a good run and a heavy dinner had upset my nerves a little. But I give you my word you will never be annoyed in this house again."

"I will take care of that, Mr. Godfrey."

"You mean that you will not stay here?"

"Of course not, Mr. Godfrey."

He turned away, with an impatient tap of his foot.

"Of course I expected that. You think it the only spirited

course open to you. Yet what further apology can I make? Don't you think proper to believe a man when he gives you his word of honor?"

I was silent. It depended upon the man—and the man's habits, I thought.

A sullen look of anger settled upon his face.

"I see, you won't trust mine. Miss Verney, you are very young, yet I should have thought you were woman of the world enough to know the difference between a ruffian and a rough gentleman."

"I am woman of the world enough to know that it is safer to avoid the necessity for making subtle distinctions, Mr. Godfrey."

He looked at me steadily.

"You ought to be satisfied now. You have paid me back insult for insult; and I leave you to judge whether the interest you give is not heavy enough. Listen, Miss Verney. Ruffian though I may be, I am not yet brutalized enough, in spite of my abandoned mode of life, to take pleasure in driving ladies out of their homes. I am going to leave Hawkstone and live altogether in London, as I have often thought of doing; instead of going next year, as I had intended, I will go next week. Will that content you?"

This offer might be sincere, or it might not; at any rate, it deserved acknowledgment. I cautiously dropped my shield a little.

"I am more than contented—I am grateful, Mr. Godfrey. But I have not been long enough at Hawkstone for it to be a home to me—"

In my heart of hearts I felt a growing respect for this straightforward young man that made me implicitly believe at least half of what he said; and I felt sure that in remaining I should be safe from further insult. I was glad when he broke in with—

"But have you considered how Mrs. Godfrey will miss you, and how the children will again be thrown upon the mercy of the servants for an indefinite time, if you leave? Forgive me for reminding you, but I believe the thought of others is more likely to move you than anything else, Miss Verney."

This clever bit of flattery afforded me a neat opening, which I took.

"I have thought about Mrs. Godfrey and the children," I began, slowly.

"Then please go on thinking about them, Miss Verney," he broke in, perhaps thinking he had spent enough time in pacifying the haughty governess, "and I am sure the more you think, the more you will feel how necessary you have become to them. As for myself, I will promise, if you like, never to speak to you again unless you first speak to me"—with a touch of dry sarcasm. "But I am in hopes that you will have the generosity to forgive me entirely, and let us be friends." And he half attempted to hold out his hand again.

I at once held out mine.

"Certainly, Mr. Godfrey."

We shook hands quite warmly and smiling; and then he wished me good morning, and went back to his breakfast.

Had I done right or wrong in deciding to stay? I could not be sure; and the question weighed upon me all day until, when the children had gone to bed, and I was alone in the schoolroom, the sense of my loneliness in the world, where I had now no home to go to in case of need, broke down my self-command, and I gave way to a fit of crying. And a wild wish that Eugene Barach were free and able, as I knew he was willing, to come and comfort me made my tears flow faster.

As I sat on the floor, with my head on a chair—my favorite position for crying—I thought I heard a sound behind the door which led into the next room. I had long before this discovered that room to be the little-used library, and I kept the door between the two rooms locked on my side. I listened, but, hearing nothing, fell back to my tears. But then I heard the unmistakable sound of the handle being softly turned. I rose, full of indignation at this attempt to intrude upon my grief; it was probably some inquisitive maid-servant hoping to get a peep at me in my dejection. Whoever it was could not get in that way I knew; but I made up my mind, red-eyed as I was, to confront and quell the indiscreet somebody. I crossed the room on tip-toe, turned the key sharply, and flung open the door with violence on to the shoulder of—Mr. Hubert Godfrey, only just missing his head. I must have hurt him, and, in

the first moment, I felt savagely glad of it. But, at the second look I gave at his face, when the first expression of surprise had left it, I felt sorry, for it was full of shy compassion.

"I did knock, Miss Verney, and you didn't answer, so I thought you were not there. I was only bringing you some grapes that I got at Covent Garden to-day, and that I thought you might like." And he offered a plate of muscat grapes that had escaped unhurt when I dashed open the door. "Indeed I did not mean to intrude upon you."

"Thank you very much. I am very sorry indeed that I was so rough, but I never thought it could be you, Mr. Hubert; I thought you were at dinner."

"I dined in town. Won't you have them?"—holding out the plate again.

"I think I would rather not take all those——"

"But you need not eat them all now, you know. Just let me put them on the table, and then you can eat them or not as you like." And he stepped forward into the schoolroom and put the plate on the table. Then he hesitated, and turned to me. "Miss Verney, I hope you won't go away because of Tom's rudeness. He is a brute; but he will not annoy you again. I dare say," he went on hurriedly, "you think I am just as bad. We are both awfully bad young men, I know; but we are not quite so bad as Delilah—Mrs. Godfrey, I mean—paints us. I wouldn't offend you or hurt your feelings for anything, now I know you. I am afraid you thought me very insolent at first; but, now I have found out how different you are from any of the girls I have ever met," he went on excitedly, "why, I'm simply awfully ashamed of myself."

Indeed he was crimson to the roots of his fair hair. I felt half inclined to laugh, and half to cry; between the two, I smiled.

"I have forgiven your brother, Mr. Hubert, so I must forgive you——"

"What! Has Tom apologized then?"—"Yes."

"Then you won't go away?"—"I think not."

He looked delighted.

"Miss Verney, we will have a bonfire and fire-works!

"And celebrate me like Guy Fawkes? I don't think I should like it, Mr. Hubert."

"Then I will have a private entertainment with illuminations, in my own room, Miss Verney, and blow up old Martin with gunpowder or oaths; you won't mind that, will you?"

I could not help laughing.

"You may prepare it as soon as you please, Mr. Hubert."

"That means I am to go. Very well, Miss Verney. Good night."

And, after shaking hands for about a minute and a half while he went on talking, he took his departure.

I sat down again and looked at the grapes thoughtfully. It would not be so easy to avoid these two young men in future. And yet, if all Mrs. Godfrey had told me about them were true—— If! I began to doubt it. Lazy and abrupt, insolent and intemperate they might be; but liars and slanderers? I doubted it. Without a spark of good feeling or generosity? I denied it. I had been touched by the expression on the face of the younger when he saw my tear-swollen eyelids. Stronger than I had ever felt it before rose within me that restless longing to check it that the sight of waste, especially the waste of human life, must always awaken in man or woman.

As I had expected, I was thenceforth on a different footing with the brothers. Mr. Tom Godfrey talked to me during breakfast; Mr. Hubert discovered that his place at the luncheon-table was draughty, and changed it for one by me. I met these advances shyly; but, as both gentlemen were perfectly kind and courteous, my life was much the pleasanter for their friendship. But I was hurt by the tone in which Mr. Hubert talked of "Delilah," as he would call Mrs. Godfrey, and soon I cut him short whenever he spoke of her.

One afternoon, when the children and I were having tea in the schoolroom, there was a knock at the door, and "Come in" brought in Hubert.

"I saw the tea brought in, so I thought I would come in and ask for a cup," said he.

He was rather shy; but, as I poured it out, I said demurely——

"It is not very strong, I am afraid. I think they must be having tea in the drawing-room, and it would be better there, Mr. Hubert."

"But what should I do there? I hate the people there are in the house now"—he generally hated the visitors—"and the ladies think me a bear." Aside—"Glad they do; there are plenty of other people to hand Del—Mrs. Godfrey her tea, you know."

As I made no answer, he set to work to captivate the children, and succeeded so well that, as soon as they had finished, they began crawling over him with buttery fingers. When he rose to go, they clung to him and begged him to come and have tea with them again on the morrow.

"Go and ask Miss Verney if I may, Rosie," he said, looking shyly at me.

And off the children rushed.

"Do let him come. Say 'Yes,' say 'Yes,' Miss Verney, please!"

I consented, but made up my mind that tea in the schoolroom must not be a standing order for him.

"What have I done that you never will stay and pour out tea for me, Miss Verney, in the morning, even when I am only a few minutes later than Tom?" asked he, made bolder by my consent.

"I was told that you did not take tea at breakfast, Mr. Hubert."

"Ah, I know who told you that!" began he, scowling.

"Your brother told me," interrupted I—for of course he put it down to "Delilah."

"Tom is a brute; he is always abusing me behind my back."

"And, considering the affectionate and brotherly way in which you speak of him, it is too bad," said I. "I shall always be very glad to pour out your tea when you are down in time, Mr. Hubert." And this speech sent him off in good humor.

After this, he was generally down before I left the breakfast-room; but sometimes he looked so pale and heavy-eyed that for pity and disgust I could not bear to glance at him.

Then I laid a plot; if I could only make the slight influence I thought I had over him strong enough to dare to remonstrate with him! He was weak, I knew; properly led, he might be docile. It was a delicate task, but it was one which no one else would under-

take, and at least I would try. I was not without vanity enough to know that there were dangers and difficulties in the way; but I felt that I could trust in my tact and caution. And I was proud of my success; repelling every attempt at complimentary or tender conversation with the grave kind manner of a much older woman, which I knew how to assume, I won his confidence before I attempted to "preach at" him.

As for Tom, whom I should not have dared to attack in this way, he gave me his confidence without the winning. I was surprised at the simple way in which he told me his business troubles, his fears about the soundness of his favorite hack, and asked me which shape of hat suited him best. In spite of all I heard against him, I both liked and respected Tom. But the hunting season was in full swing now; Hawkstone was generally full of visitors as fast as its masters, and the riotous life still went on.

At last, one day, after luncheon, when Hubert was standing talking to me, I put in the thin end of the wedge.

"Now I must go and lawn-tennis, I suppose. And I've got such a splitting headache," said he.

I looked up, trembling at my audacity.

"And it is your own fault," I said very gravely and gently.

He looked down at me in surprise, and I left him quickly before he could speak, and went back to lessons.

As the winter came on, I had grown less inclined to leave my book and my easy-chair in the schoolroom, to escape up-stairs before nine o'clock in the evening, and a brilliant plan had occurred to me. When I grew sleepy, I threw a cloak round me, opened the window, slipped down on to the grass, and ran in by the back-door, up the back staircase to my room, without being seen by the boisterous party in the great hall. The servants were in their hall, and I do not think any one knew of my nightly descent.

On the night of the day when I had reproached Hubert I opened the window as usual. It was quite dark outside. I got upon the window-sill and put my feet over, when, stretching out the first, it landed on a man's shoulder!

"Hallo!" cried Hubert's voice, as I drew back quickly and slipped down into the room again in shame and confusion.

But he, not having recognized me, and thinking I must be a thief, climbed up into the room, and, not seeing me at first, as I stood shrinking by the curtain, he seized the poker, and had his hand upon the bell, when I sprang forward and stopped him. In his amazement he let the poker fall from his hand.

"Miss Verney!"

I saw that he was perfectly sober, so I took courage and said—

"I go across the lawn and in by the back way every night, Mr. Hubert, to get to my room, to avoid the hall. And naturally I don't expect to find people under the window"—this in a rather aggrieved tone.

"You know what you said to me this afternoon, Miss Verney," he said deprecatingly. "I was smoking a cigar out of doors instead of joining the others at billiards and—and getting another headache."

A thrill of pleasure ran through me at these words; he saw the light in my face, and smiled back at me.

"You will be very glad to-morrow," said I.

"I am very glad now, since you are," he said simply.

"I was afraid you would be offended by my taking the liberty of speaking to you so."

"Offended with you, Miss Verney! Why—why didn't you speak to me about it before? I had no idea you cared. Your grave face when you said those few words to me this afternoon gave me quite a shock; you grew white as you spoke. Do you think it is so very dreadful for a man to drink a little more wine than is good for him? You must think us a bad lot here if you do."

"I don't want to insult you, Mr. Hubert."

"But tell me what you really think."

"I think that for a man in the prime of his youth to give way to a habit which will sap his manhood and degrade him, and put him at the mercy of every caprice and every passion, is the most pitiable sight in the world. I can't help it if you are angry; I can't help it if I speak like a temperance tract. I do think it, and I do mean it."

I had grown vehement; and, when I paused, I was trembling. He had listened very quietly, and presently he said—

“Do you think me a hopelessly degraded wretch then, Miss Verney?”

“If I did, do you think I should dare to speak to you so?”

“Will you tell me one thing? Has Deli—Mrs. Godfrey told you, among other nice things, that I am drunk every night?”

I hesitated; she had told me something very like it, something that I felt was rather highly colored.

“I see—she has. I don’t want to excuse myself; but I don’t want to be painted any blacker than I am. On my honor, it is a lie, Miss Verney; and it is one she has told about me before. It may be true some day—it most likely will, according to what you say,” he said bitterly; “but, weak and vicious as you think me—”

“You must not say that. You know I do not believe that. Do you think I should waste my time in appealing to your courage and manliness if I thought you hadn’t any? Do you think I should dare to speak out my thoughts so freely to you if I did not trust in your sense and generosity? I do you full justice, and I want you to do justice to yourself too.”

His face changed as I spoke; the look of humiliation left it, giving place to one of surprise, and then to a deep flush of pleasure.

“Do you really think I have all that in me, in spite of all you said about my bad habits? Why, they all say I’m a ne’er-do-weel! They have given up hoping to make anything out of me. Delilah says it is as much as the family can hope for if I keep out of the newspapers.”

“And you are resigned to such a fate as that at four-and-twenty? Why, if I were a man——”

I paused. The prospect was too vast.

“I am very glad you are not one, Miss Verney. If you were a man, you would be hard at work somewhere making yourself celebrated, while I should be left here to go to the bad as I might.”

“Why do you talk in that wild way, as if none of your friends cared what became of you? I have myself heard ladies remonstrate with you, but you only answered them lightly, and that made me afraid of speaking to you.”

"Did you ever hear them speak to me as you have done? Do you think their remonstrances are likely to do me any good? 'It is really too shocking, Mr. Godfrey; I really shall have to cut you unless you reform'; that is a speech I had made to me last week. And, worthless as these ladies think me, half of them would be only too glad to marry me, because, though I am only a younger son, I'm 'eligible,' you know, in their refined slang. Is it wonderful that I am not very chivalrous, and that at first you thought me a boor? Perhaps you think I ought to be grateful to Delilah for wanting to place me under supervision, and to her mother for setting a doctor to watch me and certify me as not responsible for my actions?"

"Oh, is that true?"

"Upon my soul it is, Miss Verney! My father put a stop to it by asking if they meant to put him under supervision next. Leila shuffled out of it and said it was all her mother's doing; but she would have been delighted to get rid of me so. I'm her crumpled rose-leaf."

"Why do you think it so unnatural of her to wish to see you cured of what you own to be a bad habit?"

"Because I know her reason, Miss Verney. Delilah's benevolence on my behalf would be equally gratified by my drinking myself to death or being worried into lunacy in an establishment for dipsomaniacs; it extends only to the wish to dispose of me in some way. You don't believe me? Listen then."

"I can not listen to any confidences concerning Mrs. Godfrey."

"I am not going to tell you anything against her, except that she is a little sceptical. And perhaps you may be able to persuade the little fool——"

"I will not hear Mrs. Godfrey spoken of in that way."

"I didn't mean it—it slipped out. It sha'n't slip out again. You may persuade her to believe something which would take a great burden off her mind. Not long after she was married, when I was only a boy of fifteen or so, I was lounging about one day in want of something to do, when I met one of the maid-servants walking quickly toward the station, carrying a parcel which she was looking at very carefully. My curiosity was roused; I watched my op-

portunity, and snatched it out of her hand. She implored me to give it back to her, saying it was something very important which she was taking for Mrs. Godfrey. Of course that made me still more curious. As she tried to take it from me, the outside covering fell off and showed a large thick envelope directed to—I won't say his name, but it was to a young naval lieutenant who had been abroad when my father married Mrs. Godfrey."

"You ought not to tell me this."

"Please listen. I told you I would tell you no harm of her. I believe she had liked this man before she knew my father, and her mother would not let her marry him because he was poor. I dare say she had not told my father a word about it, as he is awfully jealous. Very likely the packet contained nothing but old letters of his that she had not dared to send back to him while he was still abroad. I don't know why she could not burn them and have done with it. Well, when I had read the address, I just gave back the packet with a whistle. But it came to Delilah's ears that I had had it in my hands, and nothing would persuade her that I had not opened it; and to this day she lives in fear that I shall tell my father or let it out when I am—when I am not sober. I don't know what good she thinks it would do me to see my father ill-treat her, as perhaps he might do if he found it out, even now; but, because I could harm her if I would, there is nothing she would not do to harm me if she could. That is all the story. If you can persuade her that I am something better than a rough, you will be doing her a great service."

"And, if she could see that you never were anything but sober, she couldn't be afraid of its 'slipping out,' could she?" said I gently. "I am not going to preach any more," I went on quickly, as I saw his face cloud again; "I think you worthy of all trust, and I will try to persuade her of it too."

He looked down at me with something more than gratitude in his eyes.

"You shall never have cause to mistrust me if every one else thinks me a scamp," said he.

I held out my hand, smiling.

"Now I must say good night. See how late it is!"

"Why don't you go through the study to get to your room at night, Miss Verney? It has a door into the garden."

"I am always afraid of somebody being there."

"You need not be afraid. Nobody is ever there at night."

"Then I shall be very glad to do so."

And, unlocking the door between the two rooms, we separated, I going through the French window into the garden, and he back into the hall. But he took my hand again and pressed it once more before he let me go.

I slept the sleep of the just, and dreamt of Eugene Barach.

CHAPTER VII.

My wish to make Mrs. Godfrey understand Hubert better was very difficult to fulfil. The growing intimacy she had noticed between me and her step-sons had already made her draw back in her confidences to me. She looked upon any friend of theirs as her enemy, and I had to avoid their names in talking to her, for fear of calling forth a tirade to which I could scarcely now listen in silence.

Another anxiety was growing up for me. Hubert was bravely trying to break through his old habits, and withstanding "chaff" with great coolness; but he confessed to me, with that boyish ingenuousness which was the great charm of his confidences, that he found it much harder than he had expected; and he showed a dependence on my sympathy and encouragement that I tried to discourage.

At first I could not bear to check the frank boyish tenderness of his manner; I could not say "No," when he would come up to me after luncheon and say, "Miss Verney, I feel that temptation is growing upon me. Come and save my virtue by having a game of billiards with me;" or perhaps it would be chess, or I played his accompaniment while he shouted "John Peel," or "A-hunting we will go." I tried hard to fill a sister's place to him, to stir him up to manliness and energy, and my success seemed great. But when,

by-and-by, I noticed how his face lighted up upon seeing me, how eagerly he hung upon my words of encouragement or sympathy, a fear grew within me that I might not be doing him good, after all. It was not my approval I wanted him to care for, but his own; and one day I told him so. I had not justly calculated the effect of my words; he drew back, feeling snubbed.

That night—— Well, I knew it the next morning, when he came late into the breakfast-room, dull of eyes and pale of face, and ate toast in sulky silence. He could not feel more miserable than I did. When, after pouring out his tea, I rose to leave the room, I said humbly—

“I hope you will ride this morning, Mr. Hubert, and get an appetite; you have eaten nothing.”

He jumped up at once and came up to me as I was walking to the door, and asked reproachfully—

“Why were you so unkind to me yesterday then, telling me you did not care whether I pleased you or not? Don't you really?”

“I did not mean that at all. I meant that a man should guide his life rightly because he himself knows it is best and wisest, and will make him happiest, and not only because other people tell him so.”

“That is all very well for a ‘good boy,’ Miss Verney; but it won't do for me. If I don't keep straight because you want me to do so, I can't keep straight at all. Don't be angry with me. Perhaps by-and-by I shall get to that blessed state of being ‘good’ to please myself; but I am a long way from it at present, I'm afraid. Won't you let me go on trying—just at first—to please you?”

“Go on doing what you know is right, for whatever reason you like,” said I earnestly. “Now haven't you felt better and happier lately since——”

“Since you have been kind to me? Yes, certainly. Don't frown again; I meant I have felt better since I have become a reformed character. I don't look very reformed to-day, I know; I feel awfully seedy. But I'll take your advice and ride to Sevenoaks, and at luncheon-time I'll be back looking as fresh as paint.”

Two days after this Lady Catherine Hyde called for the first time since I had been at Hawkstone. I would not ask myself why

my heart beat so fast at the sight of her, yet I knew that I was longing, and yet dreading, to hear her mention Eugene Barach. But she said no word of him. She was very kind to me, but her chief favorite was evidently Tom, to whom she directed most of her conversation. I was foolish enough to feel jealous on Mr. Barach's account, but also to feel a strange thrill of selfish contentment which I tried to stifle, and dared not analyze.

Before she went away she came into the schoolroom to say good bye to me, but her manner seemed rather colder than before; then suddenly she stooped, and, putting her hands on my shoulders, looked straight into my face.

"And so, you demure little creature, you aim at universal conquest, do you? But you are too ambitious!" And, without giving me time to ask her to explain, she left me.

I was ill-natured enough to think that the character she had given me applied better to herself, and, soon after, my opinion was confirmed.

It was on the following Saturday; I was mending something for Tom with a laugh at the remembrance of a certain prophecy of Elsie's, when Hubert came in with a pile of envelopes, "at home" cards, a long list of names, and a *Where is it?*

"Mrs. Godfrey would be very much obliged if you would direct these for her, Miss Verney, as she is going out," said he. "It is a great shame to give them to you. May I help you?"

He sat down very contentedly, and I soon found that he considered himself established for the afternoon. He wasted dozens of envelopes by misdirections, tried all the pens in succession, drew caricatures of the people he disliked, talking all the time, and evidently enjoying himself very much.

"There's Lady Kate, as she looks when she expects me to go down on my knees and implore a smile," said he, as he finished a spirited sketch of that lady.

"Don't you like her, then?"

"No, not at all; and I am awfully surprised that you do, Miss Verney."

"She has been very kind to me. Don't you know that it was through her I came here?"

"Oh, if it is just that kind of liking, I understand! But you won't like her long. She is tremendously jealous of you."

"What do you mean, Mr. Hubert?"

"Why, Lady Kate thinks every one who sees her ought to be at her feet. She hates me because I am not; and she is awfully fond of Tom. So I told her that you could twist me round with your little finger, and that Tom worshipped the very ground you trod upon."

"Mr. Hubert! You dared say such things? Not only false, but very unkind!"

"They are not false, Miss Verney, indeed. Tom says you are the only woman he could trust as if you were a man; and you know you can do what you like with me. She could see for herself that Tom has got over his fancy for her, and how much he thinks of you. But she can't do you any harm."

"One woman can always do another harm, if she tries, Mr. Hubert; and in any case, I have not so many friends that I should wish to lose one."

"Don't say you haven't any friends, when you have Tom and me. Tom is rather a brute, but he wouldn't hurt you; and, as for me—— Oh, talk of the deuce——"

For Tom's sharp tap sounded on the door. He came in in his scarlet hunting-coat, looking very handsome, but too neat and clean to have done much work.

"May I come in, Miss Verney? I'm not very much bespattered."

"Bet you half-a-crown you haven't seen a fox to-day. You have just been loafing about to show yourself off in pink," said Hubert contemptuously.

"You are not far out, as it happens. It was a breakfast, you know, and they potted about so long afterwards that I lost patience and came away. Ah! so you have mended my tobacco-pouch; I'm very much obliged to you, Miss Verney. What—has Mrs. Godfrey given you all those humbugging addresses to write? And this is what Hubert calls 'helping' you, I suppose. Just press me into the service, Miss Verney, and see if I don't get on a little faster!"

"Oh, I need not trouble you, Mr. Godfrey!"

"But I want something to do as badly as Hubert. I'll just take off this scarlet that infuriates my gentle brother, and be back in five minutes."

When he had left the room, Hubert's wrath broke out.

"It's just like his officiousness! He's so infernally conceited that he never can see when he's not wanted!"

The only answer I gave to this outburst was to walk to the door. He stopped short, and began humbly—

"Miss Verney, I beg your pardon. I—I really didn't think what I was saying."

"And in that case it is better that you should talk to yourself, Mr. Hubert."

He drew his breath sharply through his closed teeth as men do when they are hurt, and said quietly—

"Very well, Miss Verney, you need not say any more cutting things; you have got rid of me for this afternoon." And he turned the door-handle.

But I was afraid of letting him go in this humor; and I said gently—

"You know, Mr. Hubert, I could not stay to listen to such language as you were using."

"No, of course not. Are you not contented now? I'm going."

"No, I am not contented that you should have thought my words too severe. I did not want to hurt you."

"But you are always hurting me now, for my confounded good, as you say!" he broke out passionately. "Yes, I'm using bad language again, I know; but I can't keep to 'poetry, prunes, and prism' when you look at me and speak to me as if you wanted to keep me a mile off. You think the whole duty of man is to keep sober, and, as long as I'm 'this side up' and 'kept dry,' you don't care two straws whether I'm happy or miserable. Even now—" looking down at me with almost savage scrutiny—"you are only speaking kindly because you are afraid I shall go and console myself with brandy-and-soda. May I ask you to let me out," asked he ironically, for I still had my hand on the door, "if I assure you that I am only going to smoke in the stable, where I shan't disgust anybody, or be in anybody's way?"

"Of course you can go, if you wish, Mr. Hubert," said I, sorrowfully, turning away from the door.

And of course he wished to go no longer, but stood irresolute and ashamed, waiting for my next words.

"And perhaps, under the soothing influence of a cigar, you will do me the justice to own that, on the whole, I have not done you so much good as might have been feared."

"Don't be satirical any more, Miss Verney," he began imploringly; "you know I can't stand it. I know I've made an ass of myself, and worse; and I beg your pardon for the language I've used, and—I suppose I must go."

Unutterably thankful to see him in his right mind again, I asked him if he was tired of directing envelopes, and he sat down and was silently writing when Tom came back. I think the latter was sharp enough to see that something had interrupted the harmony of our intercourse in his absence; but he was in a good humor, and did not even begin sparring with Hubert.

"We are going to have a very interesting visitor next week, Miss Verney," said he.

"The dowager Delilah! Do you mean that she is coming?" asked Hubert, looking up scowling.

"I beg you will not speak disrespectfully of our papa's dear mamma-in-law. I dare say you know, Miss Verney, that Mrs. Fitzgerald is an accomplished novelist; but perhaps you do not know that both Hubert and myself may be found in her novels among the 'villains.' Seriously, I advise you to conciliate her, and, above all, to join her in abusing us, for she is one of the most spiteful old hags in existence, and never goes anywhere without doing somebody harm."

"She will tear her dyed hair when she finds there is no prospect of getting me into a lunatic asylum at present," said Hubert. "She will owe you a grudge for that, Miss Verney. She has hated me like poison ever since she failed in trying to get me shut up. Upon my honor, I never feel safe while she is here; she wouldn't stick at tartar emetic!"

I began laughing at this.

"Please confess that you are a little prejudiced."

"I dare say I am. The sight of her rouses all the bad feelings I have; for the next fortnight you will have to cut me."

"Oh, don't say that!"

"And Tom too; all your reforms will melt away before her baneful influence. I begin to feel wicked at the very thought of her." And Hubert, who had recovered his good humor, broke up his pen and enjoyed my dismay.

"May I ask you a question, Miss Verney?" he began again mischievously.

"Go on."

"You really are anxious to reform Tom and me, are you not?"

"I really am anxious to—well, yes—to see you 'reformed,' if you like," I answered, laughing.

"Then why don't you offer a prize? Say you will marry the first of us who signs the pledge. It would act like a charm. Tom would go about with his pockets full of soup-tickets, which he would distribute on the Stock Exchange with a benevolent smile and a word in season. Soup-tickets are supposed to have a very good influence, are they not? And I would steal a march on him by slipping off to early service every morning, while he was still dreaming pious dreams."

"Shut up, Hubert! you are getting impertinent," said Tom.

But his brother had said it all in such a simple and ingenuous way that it was impossible to be offended: and Tom and I could scarcely help laughing; whereupon Hubert slid off his chair, and, kneeling by the table, put his head into my work-box and looked up at me.

"You know I don't mean to be impertinent, Miss Verney, don't you? And, if you don't like the plan, I won't say a word more about it. But I want just to ask you one more question."

"Which I shall probably not answer, Mr. Hubert."

"Well, it is just this. Why do ladies prefer for a hero a man of 'ideal strength,' as one hears they do"—upsetting the pins, as if in bashful awkwardness—"a horrid brute who would always have his own way? If I were a girl I would look out for a man of ideal weakness, whom I could do what I liked with."

"And whom anybody else could do what she liked with?"

"I wish I were in the pulpit, and you could not cut me short with repartees, Miss Verney. It doesn't follow that——"

But just then the sound of the ladies' voices outside the door made him stop, and Mrs. Godfrey came in with Lady Catherine Hyde. They both looked surprised and scarcely pleased; and I think the gentlemen enjoyed the sight of their changing expression.

"They are very nearly finished, Mrs. Godfrey," said Tom, after the greetings. "Here, Hubert, just direct these two, and then it is done;" and he collected the envelopes and gravely counted them.

"These little boys are rather late in leaving the schoolroom, are they not, Lady Kate?" said Mrs. Godfrey.

"Yes. Which makes the most progress, Miss Verney?"

"It is difficult to decide," interrupted Tom. "I am the quickest, but, on the other hand, my little brother takes the most pains."

"I am going to send them up to you ladies to be examined, and I hope you will 'pass' them," said I, demurely. "They are well grounded in hunting, shooting, and the use of the cue."

And so they went off laughing, and the gentlemen followed them, Hubert drawing a dismal face as he went.

I regretted this meeting, especially its effect upon Mrs. Godfrey, who was already jealous of my friendship with her step-sons. Lady Kate was going to stay a few days at Hawkstone, and I wondered whether she would trouble me with any more enigmatical reproofs. But she did not. To my eyes, sharpened by the interest I took in her, she was clearly bent on captivating Tom, who yielded to her fascinations with an amused carelessness which seemed to me to be disrespectful, but which did not offend Lady Kate. I tried not to notice how she turned all her conversation to please him, how she attracted him to *têtes-à-tête*, sympathised with him, tried to pique him. It was no business of mine. And yet I grew more and more excited, more and more perplexed, while the question rose continually in my mind, Was she still engaged to Eugene Barach, or was he free? And the thrill that ran through me when this thought rose warned me that I must work, read, write—do anything but think and dream.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF course I was disappointed in Mrs. Fitzgerald, who arrived on the day after Lady Kate's departure—a tall, fair, faded, witty lady, whom I should have liked but for a feeling that I should not care to trust her, which I should perhaps not have felt had I not been prejudiced by the stories of the young Godfreys.

But in a few days I found out that I was being watched—that not a kind word of Mr. Godfrey's to me, nor a smile of Hubert's when he met me, nor one of the glances Tom gave me when anything amused him, escaped her. And it was to her influence that I set down the fact that Mrs. Godfrey was growing colder than ever towards me. I was quite sensible of the danger of remaining in a household on good terms only with its male members; and, although I had been forced to own to myself that Mrs. Godfrey was silly, capricious, and avariciously jealous of her step-sons' extravagance, I had tried hard to please her, and to serve her in many little ways. But while her mother was at Hawkstone I scarcely got a chance of speaking to her.

Meanwhile I had to receive Tom and Hubert's confidences, very strongly expressed, especially Tom's. He generally lingered over his breakfast until his father had gone, or came down after him.

"To get a 'daily portion,' a few words of support and consolation to strengthen me throughout the day, you know, Miss Verney," he said.

I thought this flippant; but I never ventured to preach at Tom.

"That prying old woman may do a great deal of mischief. The fact is, things are looking rather bad in the City—nothing serious, for us at least, I believe; but ugly whispers might do us harm just now, and Mrs. Fitzgerald has the eye of a lynx and the tongue of a—— Well, I will be temperate. She belongs to that lowest and commonest order of clever women who are clever enough to find out what they want to know, and not wise enough to keep it to themselves."

"But could you not make her understand that in injuring you and your father she would be injuring her daughter?"

"No. The simple truth from my lips is the last thing she would believe. All my diplomacy will be directed to getting her out of the house as quickly as possible. Mrs. Godfrey is always more impracticable after her visits, and just now my father is in no mood to be worried, as she will find out a little too late, I am afraid."

These words frightened me, for I too had noticed that Mr. Godfrey had been restless and moody lately, and apt to be impatient with his wife's fretfulness.

I had more of Tom's confidence than of his brother's at this time. I could not understand why it was that Hubert sought my society less. At first I felt glad to think he was getting more independent of me; but I missed his talk. Since his suggestion that I should pass through the study at night, I had generally found him there at that time, pretending to write letters or to read: and, as I never waited to say more than "Good night," I had left him to that innocent amusement. But now he was never there, and I felt rather hurt by this neglect, which I had myself encouraged.

One evening, on opening the study door, I was surprised to find Mr. Godfrey smoking in an arm-chair by the fire.

"Why, where are you going to, wrapped up as if for the Arctic regions, Miss Verney?"

"I am going to my room, Mr. Godfrey."

"What—over the lawn? Why don't you go through the hall?"

"Because it is generally full of people at this time."

"And you are afraid they will eat you?"—"Yes."

"Now, Miss Verney, if that were your real reason, I would let you go without a word. But it is not; it is only an excuse."

"Mr. Godfrey!"

"Miss Verney! Is it not true that, instead of going straight to your room, you are benevolent enough to go and comfort 'poor Mrs. Godfrey,' or at least that you used to do so before Mrs. Fitzgerald came?"

"It is quite true that I have often sat with her in my room or hers. Why should I not, Mr. Godfrey?"

"I have no reason at all to urge against your kindness; I am only

going to ask you to extend it to 'poor Mr. Godfrey.' All the members of the household get the benefit of your sympathy but me, don't they?"

I began to be troubled.

"Don't look so grave," he went on; "you have nothing to be ashamed of. You are a good, brave little woman, and you have played good angel to my two rough boys. You must not think I am so blind as not to see who has had a hand in making them sober and—and ladies' men, you know. Wait one minute longer, please. Would you mind sitting down? I am not so much in play as you suppose. You are clever enough to have discovered that the presence of my accomplished mother-in-law does not increase the harmony of this peaceful household. I think so highly of your discretion that it is perhaps needless to warn you not to answer to the pumping she will certainly put you to, and so highly of your other good qualities that I should be very sorry if anything she might say to you were to induce you to leave my house. As she will certainly be jealous of your good influence over the boys, she will probably try her hardest to drive you away; and I want you to stand your ground, as you can, if you will. I should feel safe in backing you against Mrs. Fitzgerald, young as you are, Miss Verney."

"Thank you, Mr. Godfrey," said I, smiling, though this manner of compliment was not much to my taste.

But Mr. Godfrey was always kind to me, if his kindness was not of the most delicate sort, and I wished him good night not ungratefully. And the very next day Mrs. Fitzgerald set about the prophesied pumping. She had come into the schoolroom during the children's playtime to ask me to take up a dropped stitch in her knitting.

"Thank you, my dear. I am ashamed of being so helpless, but I have taken to knitting only lately. I find it a great resource when my eyes are tired and my brain is tired"—Mrs. Fitzgerald was fond of talking about "my brain." "I suppose you don't feel the want of anything of that sort yet, you who are still enjoying your young vigor? Ah, I have learnt the secret, you see, that you are going to join the craft some day!"

I blushed; Mrs. Godfrey had known that some verses of mine

had appeared in a magazine, and that I was thirsting for something more like fame.

"Well, I have read your verses, and, if my opinion is worth having, I think them very good. Go on writing, and especially go on reading, not light trash, but solid books that will open your mind. Now, after that little bit of conventional good advice," she went on, with a sly smile, "I don't mind confessing to you that I read just as little as I can, and have done so all my life. I respect the standard authors; but I never go to them for inspiration; I study live men and women. Now you too have opportunities of study, and I dare say you use them too. I have no doubt you could paint all our portraits very nicely if you pleased; couldn't you?"

I felt what I suppose a soldier feels when he hears the command "Prepare to receive cavalry;" and I answered truly—

"I don't think I am at all quick at reading character, Mrs. Fitzgerald. If a person treats me kindly, I label him 'good'—if unkindly, I label him 'bad.' So here there is a monotony of virtue."

"I should think it is the first time that judgment has been passed upon Hawkstone; but it does you honor all the same, my dear. Do you consider Tom and Hubert, for instance, monotonously virtuous?"

"Ah, you are making fun of my expression! I only meant that they are all kind to me. But I really think, besides, that there is a great deal to like in both of them."

"I am very glad you think so, Miss Verney. I have myself always thought that in Tom there was the making of a noble character, spoilt, unfortunately, by his father's rash indulgence. Now, if he were wisely married"—and she looked at me very keenly as she said this—"he might settle down into a steady respectable man."

"I have no doubt of it," said I.

"To Miss Falconer or Lady Kate, for instance."

"Yes. Either of them would suit him very well, as far as I can judge."

"Now Hubert is different. He is so weak that I am always afraid he will end by making some awful *mésalliance* with some unprincipled young person who does not care how vicious her husband is, provided he has money. Luckily, however, he is dependent

on his father; and Mr. Godfrey could cut him off with a shilling, if he liked."

"I don't think you need be afraid for Hubert, Mrs. Fitzgerald," I answered, with wide-open innocent eyes. "He is weak; but he is shrewd, and everybody says he has been growing much steadier lately. I should not wonder if he were to marry as well as his brother."

And I had the pleasure of seeing that Mrs. Fitzgerald had had enough of me; she very soon went off with her knitting. Next day she went away; but the reason of her sudden departure I did not learn until long afterwards.

After her talk with me, she took upon herself to warn Mr. Godfrey, in her daughter's presence, that that little scheming Miss Verney had set her heart upon marrying one of his sons.

"The very best thing she could do," said he promptly, "though she might have had better taste."

Whereupon followed a scene in which Mr. Godfrey spoke his mind out so very plainly that his mother-in-law decided to go.

Now of all this I knew nothing; yet I, alone in my schoolroom, passed an evening quite as restless and exciting as did the combatants in the drawing-room. For Mrs. Fitzgerald's coarse hints had opened my eyes to the false position I was in. I had tried to do right; but had I succeeded? At any rate, in staying longer I should do wrong. To stay in such a household when its mistress looked coldly on me was dangerous; now, when I feared that her mother had made her dislike me, it would be moral suicide. I cried at the thought of leaving Hawkstone; but to leave Tom and Hubert would be the worst of all. What would they say? Tom would express his anger loudly and decidedly; but Hubert? I could not tell. He had so certainly avoided me for the last week, ever since Mrs. Fitzgerald arrived. Was he tired of the restraint I had induced him to put upon himself? And, if so, would he not fall back into his old habits with more violence than before, when I had gone?

This fear haunted me even in my sleep; I dreamt of him broken down, blear-eyed, with hands trembling, and his handsome face swollen and distorted from the effects of long-continued vice. That

night wore me out more than a hard day's work, and next morning I almost feared to see him. Mrs. Fitzgerald was at breakfast when he came down, and he scarcely spoke to me; but, cast down and spiritless as I was at the thought of the new battle with the world I should have to begin, I seemed to see in every look of his, traces of the ruined creature of my dreams.

In little more than a fortnight I should receive my salary and go away for the holidays, and then I determined to resign my situation. In order to detach myself gradually from the household, I was more reserved than ever, and kept to my schoolroom as much as possible; but I knew that Mr. Godfrey's irritability and violence were increasing, and I sometimes saw a look of frightened helplessness on his wife's face at one of his outbreaks, which touched my heart for her.

The day came on which I received my salary. Mrs. Godfrey looked anxious and harassed; but she spoke kindly, and said she hoped I did not want very long holidays. I was surprised; but I gently asked if it would cause her any inconvenience if I were not to come back, adding that I should be glad to return, to stay, if necessary, until she found a suitable person to take my place. To my amazement, she burst into tears.

"Why do you want to go? Have you not been well treated?" she burst out, like a child. "Am I to be left quite alone, with no one I can turn to and depend upon, in this horrible, horrible, haunted house? I thought you were too sensible to mind my caprices, and I am sure I have never thwarted you in any way, Miss Verney. If my mother has, it was not my fault; and now she has gone, and Mr. Godfrey won't let her come here again. I am quite, quite alone, quite in his power," she stammered, sobbing and shuddering in a way that alarmed me.

"Dear Mrs. Godfrey, if I thought I could do you any good—"

"But you can," she interrupted sharply, lifting her tear-swollen face, much more piteous now than in its usual soft beauty. "You are firm, though you are so small and quiet, and people care for what you say. Tom and Hubert have behaved better to me since you have been here, and the children are good with you. And Mr. Godfrey would not bully you, you know. But, oh, I am getting so

afraid of him!" And the poor little cowardly creature shrank into herself, and began to cry again.

I could not resist this. I felt that there might be some truth in what she said—that, insignificant as I was, fond of her step-sons as she knew me to be, she felt that she could trust me, and at least I might comfort her.

"I should never have thought of leaving if I had known that you cared for me to stay, dear Mrs. Godfrey," I said, my voice exceedingly soft with pity.

"Then you will come back? And you will not want more than three weeks?" she asked quickly.

"No; I will come back then, certainly, if you wish."

She dried her eyes, calling herself a fright after her tears, and bemoaning her fate in her unhappy marriage, as usual. I comforted her as well as I could, told her the "boys" felt more kindly towards her than she thought, and left her, with wonder at myself for having broken for the second time my firm resolution to leave Hawkstone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day, the last of the term, and a half-holiday, I walked across the common to call on the clergyman's wife, who had shown a kind interest in me. On my way I met Hubert driving towards Hawkstone. He just raised his hat, and then, with a sharp stroke of the whip, urged on the pair to a quicker pace.

When I left the Vicarage and started on my walk back across the common, the December afternoon was already closing in, and I felt just a little sorry that I had set out so late. I had gone a hundred yards or so along the footpath among the dead bracken, when I heard a man's quick footstep behind me.

I felt frightened, and half inclined to turn back and take the long walk round by the road, when a few more strides brought my pursuer to my side. My courage returned when the danger was close. I stepped back sharply, with my umbrella ready, and faced my

enemy, who was tall and stalwart enough to make a mouthful of me. And it was Hubert.

"You are not going to assault me, are you, Miss Verney?" asked he, laughing.

"Why, where have you come from, Mr. Hubert? Half an hour ago you were driving back to Hawkstone!"

"Yes; I got home, jumped out, and walked back as fast as possible. I did not like the thought of your crossing the common alone so late."

"I am much obliged to you; but I am quite able to take care of myself," said I, lightly, but coldly.

"Don't be unkind on the very last day," he pleaded, with that earnestness which I dreaded to rouse in him.

"I don't wish to be unkind at all," said I cordially, seeing my mistake. "In fact, I confess that the thought of the walk alone over the common made me rather nervous. Of course I ought to have started earlier."

He was silent, with that shy reserve he had shown towards me lately.

"But I have a stout umbrella, and a very fair idea of its proper use, as you would have found if you had been a robber, I assure you."

"An umbrella is not sufficient protection for a—a—for a girl," said he hesitatingly; and the conviction flashed upon me that it would have been safer to face the dangers of the walk alone, after all.

"Perhaps I shall be brave enough to carry a pistol some day."

"A pistol would be safer with me than in your little hands. If you want one, let me carry it for you."

"If we talk nonsense like this, we shall not be home before it is dark," said I, with a laugh that I tried to make natural. But I knew from the tremor in his voice that the talk was not nonsense to him; he was in no mood to be managed by playful words.

"I won't talk nonsense if I can help it," he said gravely; "I don't think I could just now if I wanted to. To-morrow you are going away, and Heaven knows when I shall see you again. I seem to feel sure somehow that you won't come back, and I am mad when I think of it. Somebody will tell you we are a wicked set, and

Hawkstone a den of lions, and all your friends will join in the chorus. It is true, isn't it?" he said, stopping short and looking down into my face. "You won't come back."

His voice broke as he spoke; and for a moment I was silent, struck by a new depth and manliness in his tone. He went on passionately—

"And yet you are safe enough, Guinevere"—he did not notice that, for the first time, he was calling me by my Christian name; but, from the way it slipped out, I knew that he had thought of me by it—"safer than you could be anywhere else. You have tamed us all. You were never so loved and cared for in the parson's family as you are here; were you, Guinevere? And do you think, if you were to get into some house full of respectable Puritans, they would worship you as I do?"

I shrank away at these words; his vehemence still kept me silent.

"Don't shrink from me like that, Guinevere. You are not afraid of me because I love you?" said he—and the sudden tenderness in the rough young man touched me. "You know I love you—you know that I have altered my habits to please you, that I have given up everything you disliked, that I would give up my life at a word from you. You know, you know I love you, Guinevere."

The tears were in my eyes.

"I had hoped, I had thought lately that you had begun to live in a way worthy of yourself for something better than a girl's word," I faltered.

I was unnerved by remorse, and by his unexpected passion and earnestness.

"No, I'm not a bit conscientious or heroic, Guinevere. If I've led a better life, it has been for you, not for myself. Why, did you think," said he suddenly, "that I haven't come near you lately because I didn't want to do so? If you knew how I have hungered for a word from you! But I didn't dare. I did not want to set that old Fitzgerald cat chattering about you."

I started; I had never thought of putting down his avoidance of me to a chivalrous motive.

"And, since she has been gone you seem to have crept out of

every one's way, and I have not dared to come to you. But it was very hard not to speak to you or look at you; and the thought of losing you altogether— Oh, Guinevere, if you don't come back, I shall go to the bad headlong!"

"Hush! Don't talk like that; it is cowardly, and makes me miserable."

"Forgive me, my darling," said he, his voice soft again. "Don't cry. What a brute I am to make you cry."

I dived down into my pocket for my handkerchief, but my quivering fingers dropped it. He picked it up and tenderly wiped my eyes before I could stop him. Then he gently took my hand.

"Don't you think you could marry me, Guinevere?" he asked shyly.

In spite of all he had said, the words gave me a shock. It was the first time they had ever been said to me. For the first moment, touched by his gentleness and earnestness, I could almost have said "Yes." Then my thoughts turned to the only man I had loved, the only man I could have married. But Hubert was pressing my hands more tightly, was bending down over me until I felt his breath upon my forehead. I looked up quickly.

"I cannot—indeed I cannot!"

My hands shook with the trembling of his, as he held them still in his own.

"Can't you trust me? Am I too worthless?"

There was no bitterness in his tone, only piteous entreaty.

"Oh, no, it is not that!" I rallied my thoughts to give him a collected answer, and drew myself up; he would not let me take my hands away. "There is between us every barrier that ever stood between man and woman, Mr. Hubert."

"Don't call me 'Mr. Hubert,' unless you wish to hurt me," interrupted he.

"There is the first barrier—difference in position; and it is the least of all," I went on quickly. "Then disposition—you are keenly sensitive, and I am hard and bitter. I have often wounded you already."

"But you can be sweet, sweeter than any one I ever met. That

is your great charm, Guinevere. I shouldn't care a rush for the sweetness of a woman who couldn't be bitter. I would rather be snubbed by you than caressed and flattered by any other woman in the world."

"But you would not always think so. Then my tastes are not the same as yours."

"Heaven forbid! But, Guinevere, a man's tastes are always coarser than a woman's. You like men to ride and hunt; and do you think I should like you better if you smoked and rode to hounds? I hate mannish women. You are ever so much cleverer than I; but then lots of women are cleverer than their husbands—most women are, I think. But you are not intellectual, you know; you like life better than books. Your eyes dance and your face beams when you are dancing or playing lawn-tennis, and you enjoy yourself like a child. Oh, Guinevere, I've watched you till I can read your beautiful eyes better than a book! If you would only let me love and take care of you, my darling! I am weak, I know; but I would be strong for you. I believe I could be content not to have you if you had a happy home of your own; but I cannot help thinking that, loving you as I do, I could make you happier than you can be all alone in the world."

I could not reason against a love like this; my firmness was going; with a sharp pull, I dragged my hands away from his.

"Hubert, I cannot marry you! I have done you cruel wrong; but indeed, indeed I did not mean it. You will think me a heartless coquette, for I did try to make you like me. But I did not mean to go so far. I meant only to persuade you to give up what was bad for you, and now—and now I have only made you take to what is worse."

I broke down here in miserable sobbing; but, as I finished speaking, he drew a sharp breath, as if in pain.

"Guinevere, be honest with me. Do you love some one else?"

Burning, shaking with shame, I hung my head for a few moments; then, in a low unsteady voice, I answered him.

"I have never told any one in the world. I—I believe I do."

Hubert said nothing for a minute, then slowly—

"And you will marry him?"

"No—oh, no! He does not know—he never will know; I shall never see him again. Don't ask me any more."

I had turned from him as I spoke; and now I left him standing in the path, and hurried on alone. But, after a few steps in the dusk, my eyes half-blinded by rising tears, I stumbled into the dead bushes on the common.

Then again I heard his footsteps behind me; and he stopped, and drew my arm through his, whispering gruffly, "Poor little thing!" And then we walked on together, both miserable, and yet both half-comforted.

It seemed strange for Hubert to be protecting and pitying and comforting me; but he had shown himself in a new light that afternoon; and, in his manly self-control, I had felt him my superior as I stood there before him asking pardon for the wrong I had done him.

We scarcely spoke as we walked fast over the common in the darkening afternoon.

"You are not crying, are you, Guinevere? You are not afraid now? Don't be unhappy. You haven't hurt me, dear, and you mustn't think you have," said he, pressing the arm he held gently with his.

When we got half-way through the park, he left me, saying he had to go to the stables; but I knew that it was to prevent the chatter of the servants, if they had seen us come in together.

That evening, as I sat alone in the schoolroom, I wept bitterly. Now that I saw the result of my attempt, at twenty, to play the part of Mentor to this hot-blooded, generous-hearted young man, I wondered at my own rashness and audacity. I felt like the sculptor who saw, in answer to his own prayer, the statue he had labored upon standing before him glowing with life. The lazy, insolent, ne'er-do-weel whom I had despised while pitying him, whose reformation I had looked upon almost as the taming of a beast, whose unwelcome affection I had thought I could turn aside by a little satire, a little primness, had suddenly appeared to me generous, unselfish, tender. I bitterly blamed myself for my shortsightedness. Then I tried to find consolation in asking myself if I could call the disappointment I had caused him a wrong, when it had brought out

such noble qualities in him. The pain I had caused him had but quickened him to greater generosity. But it wrung my heart to think of the tone in which he had spoken. Would he turn reckless? If so, I should feel that it was I who had ruined him. Rather than that, I must, I would risk all, and marry him. But my heart beat in wild revolt at the thought.

For I was not free; if I had been, I could scarcely have steeled myself against a love like Hubert's. But, loving Eugene Barach with a love that seemed the more intense from my struggles to keep it down, to stifle it, to ignore it, I felt that I should be degraded in my own eyes if I married another man. It was my own hopeless, hidden affection that had made me feel so secure, had blinded me so to the danger I was running in my attempt to reform a wild Hotspur only two or three years older than myself.

My excitement, wearing off, left me undecided. Ought I to come back to Hawkstone? Would my presence only encourage false hopes in Hubert, and give him fresh pain, or would my going away make him cast off all restraint, as he had threatened? I was too worn out to decide then; I wrapped myself in my mantle, and opened the door into the study, and Hubert started up from an arm-chair as I did so.

"Ah, I knew you would cry in there all alone—and I did not dare to come and comfort you!" said he passionately. But I have something to say to you that I must say;" and his voice dropped, and was grave and earnest. "Mrs. Godfrey says you have promised to come back. You won't let what I said to you this afternoon prevent you, will you?"

I looked straight up into his face, and I made up my mind.

"No. I will come back."

He stooped and kissed my hand.

"Don't do that, please," said I. "You must never speak like that again, you know."

"I never will, Guinevere. You can trust me; I think you do now. And you need not be afraid of my going wrong again. I believe you have made a man of me, Guinevere."

I looked up at him with smiling, overflowing eyes.

"Good night, good night!"

But as I held out my hand his self-control gave way.

"For three weeks! Oh, my darling, my darling, it will be three weeks' death to me!"

"Oh, Hubert—my trust!"

He said no more; but once again he caught my hand, and this time I could not stop him as he pressed it to his breast, to his lips, in passionate agony. At last I snatched it away, opened the French window with trembling fingers, and ran out into the darkness, with his voice ringing in my ears. What had I done? How would it end?

CHAPTER X.

NEXT day I was with Elsie again, in a dingy London lodging; our mother was still abroad, and Maynard had gone out to her. It was sweet and restful to sit with my darling's fair head on my lap again, to talk or be silent as we felt inclined, which is the highest privilege of friendship. It was delightful to engage again in the game of repartee, largely mingled with burlesque personal abuse, which formed our chief amusement when alone together. But it was not just quite the same as it had been.

"We are a little older, you know, Elsie," I said, when she suggested that we were not so lively as we used to be.

But it was not that. Elsie was chafing under the schoolroom routine, which had always weighed more heavily on her shoulders than on mine. She quoted *Rosalind* and *Lady Teazle*, and confessed that she had amused herself by studying those parts during her solitary evenings, when her pupils had gone to bed. This alarmed me. I felt that she was turning her thoughts to the stage again; but I thought it wiser not to speak of it, and, instead, to encourage her to draw.

"You will be a great artist some day, Elsie, if you go on studying. You won't have to waste all your youth in the schoolroom, dear, as you say. It is impossible, with talent like yours. I wonder you can live without drawing, any more than I could without scribbling."

"I have drawn, Guinny; I have drawn until my head swam. But it is such hopeless work. You think I have genius just because I can draw pretty faces out of my head; but I know better. Talent—and I have talent, I know—is of no use without study; they all say so. And how can I study when I am teaching manners and the alphabet all day long?"

But during those three weeks she did study harder than ever—too hard, I thought bitterly; for, by the eagerness with which she worked, I knew how strong her hatred of our dull profession must be. Sometimes—very seldom—she gave way to despair.

"It is of no use, Guinny. When you go away, I shall be dragged back into the education malestrom again, and then for another wasted three months! Why have you grown so tame, Guinny? Once you cried out against this clogging governnessing as loudly as I. You said that we, who had no home, wanted a career. Have the fleshpots quenched your spirit? Are you content to listen to scales and verbs till the wrinkles come?" Then, changing from earnest to arch— "But then you have Hubert and Tom!"

And then she stopped to hug me, afraid she had hurt me; for I was silent. I had told her everything except that one confession I had made to Hubert; not that I could not trust her, but that I felt my policy of repression and suppression to be the safest for me. If it once came to confidences and mutual sighs and sympathy, I should let myself go, and become limp and maudlin. But bright Elsie could guess, and probably had guessed. There was between us that rare bond which respects reserve; even in our few quarrels hasty Elsie never touched where she could have wounded deepest. This may have been partly due to the fact that I made myself so exceedingly and lastingly disagreeable when hurt; but how few angry women would be deterred by that or any other consideration from "speaking their mind"! She understood with that delightful intelligence which stopped short of knowing my bad qualities, while I understood her well enough to know that she had none.

We lived a sober idyl in that London lodging, in spite of our cares. She had cried while I told her about Hubert, and upbraided me ruthlessly for my hardness of heart.

"And you used to say you would like to be loved! What more would you have? Do you want him to die for you?"

"Don't, don't, Elsie!" cried I, with a start and a shiver. "You forget that he is only twenty-four; and young men love lightly."

"They don't suffer lightly, if you break their hearts, I suppose?"

"Elsie, you are getting melodramatic. I have known Hubert Godfrey only a few months——"

"And, from the progress you have made, it will take only a few months more to drive him mad. Oh, Guinevere—and he is so handsome too!"

"What do you mean? You have never seen him."

"Yes, I have. He was in church last Sunday. I am sure it was he. He looked at you the whole time. Is he not tall, with hair neither light nor dark, and a moustache rather lighter, and a fair skin and gray eyes, and a way of stroking his under-lip?"

"Yes. Why, Elsie, how could you tell when I did not see him? Why did you not tell me?"

"Because I knew you would not like it. But it is better you should know; perhaps it will soften you."

But it made me miserable. If he could not pass a week without coming merely to look on my face, would it not be cruelty to return to Hawkstone and prolong his pain? Elsie was aghast at the idea of my not going back.

"What—break your promises to everybody, and leave Hubert to his ruin?"

"You don't seem to mind the thought of giving me a husband who might end his days in a madhouse, then, Elsie?"

"Guinevere, it is cruel to say that! Do you think I don't care what becomes of you? He would never go wrong, if you would stretch out a hand to save him. I know what you are going to say—his family. Why, you know they would be very glad to see him settled. And I shouldn't care for that greedy old Mrs. Fitzgerald, who wants to see both brothers go wild and quarrel with their father, so that she and her daughter and grandchildren may get what ought to be theirs. Don't be cross with me, Guinny. I cannot help taking his part, ever since I saw that longing look of his at you."

And through all her reproaches she made no disparaging reference to Eugene Barach, as I am sure she would have liked to do. We buried that strange episode of the stranger's illness.

The keen interest Elsie took in Hubert prevented her thinking much of her own admirers, and I rejoiced mildly that I heard but little of Mr. Burns.

I received from Mrs. Godfrey a handsome Christmas present, "with kindest regards from all," and two or three letters, in each of which she spoke anxiously of my return, in the last begging me to name the train I intended to come by. I did so, of course.

Elsie sat by me in the train before it started.

"Oh, Guinny, I shall be so wretched when you are gone! I have only one comfort—poor Hubert will be happier. You will be kind to him, won't you?" she whispered anxiously.

"Listen, Elsie; I have made up my mind," I whispered back. "If nothing else will cure him, I will marry him."

"But, Guinny, that won't do unless you love him. But you will—I feel certain of it. You would be utterly heartless if you did not. I feel happier since you said that, though. Good-bye, my own darling!"

And she jumped out at the last minute, and stood on the platform, looking after me with her loving brown eyes as the train moved off. And at the other end of my journey another pair of loving eyes met mine. Walking out of the station, I found the mail Phaeton, with Hubert standing beside it, flushed and rather nervous.

"You will come with me this time, won't you, Miss Verney?" he asked, with a shy laugh.

When we had started with the hood half up—"for the beastly wind"—he said—

"I didn't dare wait for you on the platform, for fear I should get red or do something foolish when I saw you."

This opening was bad.

"I hope every one at Hawkstone is quite well, Mr. Hubert," said I decorously.

"No; they are all 'very bad,' and have been for the last three weeks," said he mischievously. "But I dare say they will recover

now. Tom is the worst. Tom and I shall come to blows this evening, I expect," he went on cheerfully.

"What do you mean?"

"He asked me what train you were coming by, and I—well, I forgot, and told him the 4.15 instead of the 3.12. The fact is, I wanted to see you before Tom did, to tell you something about him."

Here Hubert tickled the off-side horse, a restive chestnut, with the whip; the animal kicked, and he had a few minutes' trouble in getting the pair into steady going again. He was nervous. He went on in jerks, looking down at me as he spoke.

"That Lady Kate has got hold of him again. He is off his head about her. I'm afraid they'll—make a match of it."

His voice was actually unsteady as he finished, still looking down at me. A wild hope shot through me at these words. If Lady Kate were going to marry Tom, she could not marry—I suppose my face changed. Hubert bent down, with the reins firmly enough in his hands, but his eyes fixed eagerly on me.

"Then it isn't Tom?" he whispered.

I understood him. Then he had thought I was in love with Tom! I blushed; but I almost laughed.

"No, it certainly is not Tom."

Hubert drew a long breath, and cocked his whip in a buoyant manner.

"To tell you the truth, I did wonder at your preferring that beast Tom to me," he muttered half shyly, half impudently.

He did not wait for me to rebuke him, but broke out into an absurd disquisition upon agricultural prospects, about which he knew rather more than the pair he was driving and rather less than I did. At last, excited out of my stately primness by the suggested hope I dared not dwell upon and by the drive through the winter air, I fairly laughed at him; upon which he broke off his discourse with a sudden guffaw and looked down upon me with the happiest of smiles.

"I think I won't try to improve your mind again, Guin— No; I suppose I must say 'Miss Verney'?" said he hesitatingly.

"Certainly you must, Mr. Hubert."

"Yes, yes, of course, Miss Verney," he answered hastily. "By-the-by, I have something else to tell you. I told you everything had gone wrong while you were away. I am really getting quite sorry for poor little Delilah; she has been having a hard time of it lately."

"How? What is the matter?"

"The governor bullies her so. She gets frightened to death if he looks at her. And then, when he is angry, she tells him little lies to pacify him, and he finds them out—and nothing irritates him so much. I'm afraid—I'm afraid, you know—that he is going to have an-another attack."

I knew what he meant, and I held my breath.

"Are you afraid? Delilah wouldn't write about it, for fear you would not come back; but you must know; so I thought it better to tell you. There is nothing for you to be afraid of. You won't want to go away again, will you?" he went on entreatingly, as I was silent.

"No, I am not afraid, only very sorry," said I, with tears in my eyes.

"Perhaps it is not so bad as we think. He has been harassed and worried lately. But things are looking better now, and I dare say he will get over it. It will all go right now you are back."

It was of no use to argue that this was absurd; he did not contradict me, but only stroked his moustache and quietly laughed.

"I won't answer for the consequences if you take such long holidays next time, Miss Verney. I've taken to going regularly to the City—and I hate the City—to fill up the endless three weeks."

"I am very glad," said I; "it is much better than doing nothing."

"I don't know whether you would say so if you knew the City. And I don't do much good there. Tom says I make the worst clerk in the office."

I thought this very probable; but I would not discourage his new industry; and in a few minutes we were spinning through the park up to the house.

Every one seemed pleased to see me, and I was glad to be back at Hawkstone, in spite of the aching at parting with Elsie. Tom

was waiting in the schoolroom when I came down to tea after my rapid unpacking. He took my hands in both his and squeezed them heartily.

"Glad to see you, Miss Verney. You have to thank Hubert's stupidity that I did not inflict myself upon you on the journey down. I suppose you have heard all the news from him?"

"Yes," said I, a little archly.

"Ah, he has been tattling about my affairs, of course!" said Tom, with a short laugh.

"May I congratulate you?"

He did not know how eagerly I longed for him to say "Yes."

"Well, you may in a few days, I suppose."

I stood perplexed. Had Lady Kate really thrown over Eugene, or was it possible that she was only playing with Tom, and had let the game go as far as this? My mind, now prejudiced against her, told me that it was possible; and I decided to summon courage to warn him, if it were not too late. For I thought I could guess what a terrible effect an unexpected rebuff would have upon his proud self-reliance. But the task was difficult. I had no right to betray Lady Kate's affairs, yet nothing less than an approach to the truth would do, I felt sure.

"Please don't think me impertinent or ill-natured; I have heard a report that she is engaged already."

He looked surprised at my gravity, then said confidently—

"Rumor has gone a little too fast, as usual; but Fact will soon catch her up in this case"—with a laugh. "You will be glad to see me 'settled,' like all the rest of my kind friends; won't you, Miss Verney? I won't say how much your influence has had to do in inducing me to settle," he went on, with sudden gravity.

I looked up at him in astonishment.

"Because I am abrupt and brusque," he went on, "and don't melt at a word, like Hubert, you think my hide is as tough as an elephant's. But you cannot know how strong the influence of a noble-minded woman is to urge a man to make the best of himself. Don't look so meek and frightened. You must know what you have done for Hubert. During all these three weeks that you have been away, contrary to my expectation, I confess, I have never seen

him anything but sober. I declare I thought him nothing but a lout till you came; and now I begin to think there is something in him. I hear Mrs. Godfrey's voice; she is coming to welcome you back."

I thought her lovely face looked worn. She was very kind, and seemed glad to see me. So did Mr. Godfrey, whose look and manner were more restless than ever.

A few days afterwards, when he and Tom were talking "shop" at the breakfast-table, I heard something that interested me deeply. It was about the Bouches du Rhône. The thing had been brought forward again, with good names to back it this time, and some prospect of success. The Stock Exchange was in doubt whether to take it up; Mr. Godfrey spoke well of it—Tom was cautious. Then came what was the pith of the talk to me.

"That young Barach has astounding pluck; his audacity is really splendid. Fancy coming back to worry the thing into life again, with the defeat still fresh in people's minds," said Mr. Godfrey.

"Then you think he is something more than the fly on the wheel?"

"Not a doubt of it! He went to the Count himself and almost persuaded him to look into it—almost, so far. He deserves to succeed. They call him Sisyphus Barach in the House."

"Yes; in the Foreign Market yesterday some fellow asked 'Who was Sisyphus?' There was a roar, of course; but half of them had to hunt him up in Lemprière, I expect."

I struggled against my thoughts all through that day in vain; they would fly back again and again to Eugene Barach. With all my heart I wished him good luck. I wondered whether he had forgotten me, whether this man, so strong in his energy and perseverance, was light of love; and I felt that it could not be. For the first time the thought sprang up in my mind that a will like his would make its way over the stoutest obstacles, and that the barriers between him and me must give way like the rest. Perhaps the great barrier was already broken; perhaps Lady Kate had set him free. If so, why had he not sought me out already? Of his power to find me, if he had the will, I had no doubt. I was saved from giving myself up to this anxiety by a nearer one.

Mr. Godfrey was growing day by day more morose, gloomy, and restless. Of late it had been impossible to content him. At one time he would have the house full of visitors, and be almost boisterously gay. Then he would insist upon his wife's getting rid of these as quickly as she could, saying he wanted quiet; then his sullen irritability would bring the frightened, helpless look into Mrs. Godfrey's eyes. At these times she would ask me to come and play the piano in the drawing-room after dinner; it seemed to soothe him, half stupefied as he generally was. His physician had prohibited "alcohol in any form," but he recklessly disregarded this caution.

Once, when I had gone to my room, my nerves highly strung with a fear of coming peril for him, which had seized me as I saw a look of vacancy come suddenly into his eyes, I fancied I heard a woman's shrill cry—Mrs. Godfrey's—come along the passage from their room. It might be fancy; but it was only too probable. My heart ached for the poor little creature, at the mercy of a man who alternately neglected and tyrannised over her, and for the tyrant scarcely less.

He was ordered change of air, and went away for a fortnight to Paris, but came back in four days, fiercer, more sullen, irritated to frenzy by the grim welcome which met him. For Mrs. Godfrey and Tom were talking and laughing with some friends, I was sitting half behind a curtain, and Hubert was lounging not far off, when the master of the house walked quietly in. And the surprise brought—not welcome, but dead silence, while his wife turned ghastly white and caught her breath. In another moment one of the ladies, with tact which should have been readier, gave the signal for a general expression of delighted astonishment. But the harm was done. In that terrible first moment, as he stood there, a feared and hated intruder in his own home, I longed to spring forward and tell him I was glad to see him. I tried to look so when he espied me in my corner and came up to speak to me; and he seemed pleased.

The next morning, when he came down, he asked me to tell him what had gone on in his absence, and I gave him an account of the small daily events as brightly as I could.

"Go on," said he, when I paused.

When he had finished breakfast, instead of going away, he drew an arm-chair to the fire and told me to go on talking.

"I suppose you think I'm off my head, Miss Verney; but don't be afraid; I am not—yet. Never mind if you have nothing to say—just talk; it keeps me from thinking."

I dared not take up my work; I knew instinctively that would irritate him; so, taking a chair by the window, I chattered on. Heaven knows what I said—whatever nonsense came uppermost—and it was not easy even to talk nonsense with the unhappy man's eyes fixed intently upon me, as if I held some charm to drive away evil thoughts, or evil dreams.

So I sat for nearly two hours. I began to wonder restlessly when I should be free, for the strain was growing too hard, when he got up and came to me.

"You are a good little creature, and a sunbeam in this infernal dismal place. I must not keep you any longer." He patted my shoulder as if I had been a child; and, with a stretching and stamping, as if to shake off his melancholy, he left the room.

Of course I found the children in mischief; delighted at this unusually long play-hour, they had ended by a pitched battle, in the full enjoyment of which I fell upon and separated them.

But that day had brought for me a new duty. The long morning talk, which was all but a monologue, entered regularly into my day's work. Tom and Hubert were sometimes in the room, and then they helped me; but sometimes even their voices would jar upon him, and then they had to go. He would come down now early, now late; but I must always be ready with tea and talk; so Mrs. Godfrey, thankful to be able to count on a short time of peace, sent the children every morning for a long walk with the nursemaid. He had been advised not to go to the City for a time; but advice was lost upon him.

"Ask the quacks what I am to do if I am not to go to the City, and not to hunt, and to sign the pledge. I'll kill myself my own way, and then let them prescribe for the body."

He hunted still; but, though the fatigue brought sleep, the exercise did not bring enjoyment. He had lost his nerve, his sons said.

"It brings a lump into my throat to see my father, who used to

have nerves of iron, look twice at a fence, Miss Verney; it does indeed," said Hubert. "You know he came a cropper out with the hounds last week? Well, it happened like this. For the first time in my life I saw him looking for a gate; he noticed my curious look, and I saw his face grow dark. He made straight for the fence—it was an awkward place; the brute he was on rushed at it, and the governor got pitched over his head."

Tom was most uneasy about his father's doings in the City.

"If somebody would only persuade him to keep away from the office for a few weeks, it would be better for him and for the business too. I can do everything there is to be done as well as he. He does no good in the state he is in now—only thunders at the clerks and makes clients uneasy. Do you think you could do anything, Miss Verney? It can do no harm to try: he won't mind anything you say."

I naturally felt shy of making such an attempt; but one day I did suggest, as he got up to go to the City, that he should take a drive instead: and he followed my advice.

When he came back early from the City, he would often send for me and the children. I tried to interest him in them and encourage them to prattle to him, which was difficult at first, as they stood in awe of their father. But the eager desire for distraction, which was so painfully apparent to my older eyes, made him treat them with a new gentleness and playfulness which reminded me of Hubert. I even dared to tell him laughingly that he ought to mind the doctor's orders, and not to drink between meals.

The change from the hearty, somewhat abrupt manner, which had seemed to denote self-reliance, to docility was touching and even alarming. I was glad of the little I could do to cheer him, and to avert the catastrophe which Tom confided to me that he feared—viz. that his father would break away from home altogether. This confidence shocked me.

"Does Mrs. Godfrey know," I asked anxiously.

I had often been annoyed by her helpless shrinking from her husband, which irritated him and made her rather a hindrance than a help to his recovery. As well as I could, without being obtrusive, I had calmed her fear of him, and introduced her under the bright-

est colors into my talk to him. At my question Tom looked down, and answered shortly and gravely—

"I believe she does. But you must not count on her to help keep him at home."

This insinuation, coming from Tom—who, to do him justice, was not fond of slander—startled me.

"I must speak freely to you, Miss Verney; for you, who can do most, ought to know all. Mrs. Godfrey cares for nobody but herself. It is hardly surprising that the poor little characterless thing has got tired of being bullied; and she wants to be rid of her husband now that he has become her tyrant. He has been kind to her for years in his way, and it was the way of diamonds and indulgence, the way she liked best; but of course during the past two months she has had time to forget all that. He frightens her, and then she irritates him by little lies and prevarications. And now that her mother has put it into her head that we are going to fail, why, it is hardly worth while, you see, to continue to love, honor, and obey."

I looked up at Tom with a sharp glance of reproach; but it was not an idle sneer—it was the bitterness of his heart that had brought out the stinging words.

"Madam has set her heart—pardon me, Miss Verney; you have heard of such things—upon a sensation-scene in the Divorce Court. You must forgive me for speaking plainly; you may do something with her. Talk to her of her children, of her own modesty. No, no; use a stronger argument than those. Tell her that we are not going to fail, that riches are going to increase, that there will be bigger diamonds and older china than ever for her, if she will only wait a little," he burst out, in sharp scorn.

"Oh, you are cruel!" I cried.

"Miss Verney, I can't help it. If I were married to a woman like that, I would blow my brains out. Anything but that fatal want of truth; it paralyses a man. Heaven knows I pity my father!"

And this man loved Lady Kate! What would happen if he found her false? The thought flashed across me as he spoke, and haunted me when I was alone. Since the unhappy change in his

father, Tom had developed rapidly, and he was now the real head of the house, at home and in the City. I had always admired his coolness and quick decision; but I had seen him too in his stormy moods, and I could guess the strength of the passion which would now and then break out so fiercely in the confidences he gave me. Did Lady Kate know what she was doing? Was Lady Kate off with the old love? Had Lady Kate thought that both her strong-willed lovers would be like wax in her hands, when she made up her mind which she preferred? She was growing into a Fate in my mind, with the threads of the lives of men and women in her capricious fingers. Whenever I thought of Tom, Eugene Barach, poor Hubert, or myself, like that of a baleful enchantress rose in my mind the handsome face of Lady Kate.

CHAPTER XI.

I FELT almost startled when, a few days after this talk with Tom, I received an invitation from Lady Kate to bring my pupils and spend an afternoon with her. When Tom heard of it, he said he would come home early and drive us over himself. He was back from the City soon after luncheon. I noticed that he had had his hair cut; and he said one of his boots pinched him, from which I opined that they were new. And he confided to me composedly, as we drove along, that he was "going to try his luck." Indeed, he looked as handsome and manly a suitor as even a spoilt beauty could desire. I believe I felt more anxious about her answer than he did. For my anxiety was threefold—for Tom, for myself, and—for Eugene.

When we drove up the avenue to the house, we saw a horse, with a man's saddle, being led from the front door to the stable; but my prophetic instinct failed me on that afternoon.

Lady Kate's mother had been dead many years, and she had a kind and convenient chaperon in the person of a rather dull-witted aunt, whom we found in the drawing-room. Kate was in the garden, the blundering old lady said, and she offered, with no great

alacrity—she had a cold—to lead us to her. We thanked her, would not trouble her for the world, should find Lady Kate easily ourselves; and Tom and I sallied forth, leaving the children with her, by her wish.

The garden was bare enough now, in early February; but it was a pretty place in the flower-and-leaf season. Its great attraction was variety. It was divided into two parts by a steep slope covered with trees; at the top of this slope was a roomy summer-house, commanding a view, down two wide paths cut through the trees, of the lower garden, and of a very ornamental poultry-yard, one of Lady Kate's pet fancies. And Tom and I, entering the summer-house together in search of Lady Kate, had an uninterrupted view of the scene, which was at that moment improved by human interest. For at the bottom of one of the paths stood Lady Kate in furs, with a huge basket on her arm, and walking down the path towards her was a gentleman whose back was towards us; but my heart leapt up, for I knew him! Tom and I were just in time to see the meeting. She held up her radiant face without reserve, and Eugene Barach kissed her. It seemed to my fascinated eyes that the kiss was a colder, more careless one than I should have cared to take from the man I was to marry; but warm and cold were alike to Tom. He started forward with raised arm and an expression of face it were best not to see; but I seized his arm and clung to it with all my might.

"You must not go; you can do nothing; she is engaged to him," I gasped.

He turned so sharply that I staggered.

"What! And you knew it, and you never told me! Good Heaven, you false too?"

"I did not know it. I knew she had been engaged; but I thought she must be free again."

But he could only half believe.

"Do you know this fellow? Who is he?"

The blood flew to my face and the tears to my eyes.

"Look!" said I. "You know him too."

Tom turned abruptly to the window, and looked again at the pair now talking below.

"Eugene Barach!" he exclaimed, with a bitter imprecation.

"You have no right to say that; he was first," cried I.

Tom looked at me again, surprised by my sudden fire; but it died out under his gaze, and left me trembling. He had no pity upon my confusion, but continued to look straight at me.

"Have you known him long, may I ask, Miss Verney?"

"Only a few months."

"And did you know of his engagement from the first?"

I was surprised by these questions; but the subject concerned him, and I answered simply, "Not at first."

He looked at me still, but his piercing gray eyes hardly seemed to see me; then he turned away, with a short, dry, bitter laugh.

"Well, I sha'n't try my luck, after all, Miss Verney. I suppose it wouldn't do to slink off without paying our respects; but we shall have to reconcile ourselves to being *de trop*."

I felt too profoundly jealous and miserable to admire Tom much for the coolness with which he bore his mortification. I felt as if I could not face Eugene and Lady Kate together calmly. But pride came to my rescue; the shame of the meeting was for the man who had confessed love to one woman while he stood bound to another; there could be no shame for me, except in showing weakness, and my rising spirit told me I would die rather than give one sign.

Eugene and Lady Kate were now coming up the steep path towards the summer-house, Lady Kate talking with much vivacity. I stepped out just in time to avoid playing eavesdropper, and Tom followed. Eugene was speaking. He stopped short in his speech and in his walk, and his face changed; then he looked from me to Tom, with a quick glance of anger. I had not counted upon his losing his self-possession; but my own was safe enough now. After greeting Lady Kate, who had started with a flush of dismay on seeing Tom, I turned calmly to Eugene.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Barach."

He was ready by this time with an equally bright and original answer; and, when he and Tom had shaken hands with warm cordiality, we all turned towards the house, I with Eugene, Tom following with Lady Kate. Within the last quarter of an hour we had all made unpleasant discoveries, had all received severe shocks, and I

suppose we were all suffering in our wounded love or vanity as acutely as human beings safely can; yet in that short progress to the house we women, at least, were absolutely gay. I heard Lady Kate's pretty laughter behind me, and it stimulated me out of my usual gravity. I was lively, satirical, flippant, and I had the satisfaction of thoroughly annoying Eugene; yet, as we entered the house, and he looked at me with hurt, grieved surprise, I was silenced for one moment by a sudden choking in my throat which warned me that tears were too near. But, on the surface, we women had the best of it. Tom was drier, more biting than ever; Eugene simply talked nonsense. The latter did not stay long; he tried in vain to speak a few words to me apart, and I saw him look at my ringless hands with relief before he took leave. Then Tom got better. Instead of following suit and beating a retreat, he stayed to drive back the children and me; and I, unobtrusively employed in discussing crewel patterns with the aunt, and in keeping down the rising spirits of the children, could mark the skill with which he repelled all the wiles of Lady Kate, who was in her most fascinating mood.

After tea, we started for Hawkstone; we were more silent than in coming.

"This ought to cure me of boasting, Miss Verney," he said suddenly, with his short laugh, which had grown harsh to-day.

"I am so very sorry," said I sadly; "I spoke to you as openly as I dared."

"Yes, you told me you had heard she was engaged," said he slowly; "and I, like a fool, thought the report you spoke of must allude to me."

"Indeed I thought she could not have encouraged you so much if she had not been free again."

"Yes, she certainly does not allow the bond to cause her any irksome restraint;" and his tone grew savage again. "On the whole, I would rather be in my shoes than in Barach's, after all. Am I offending you by talking like this? Does 'courtesy demand' that I should still speak of her with all reverence as a guileless angel, because she is a woman? I never did think her guileless; but I believed her to be as high-minded as high-spirited, and, like

an ass, I thought she cared for me. As to that, she all but told me so. And I don't mind your knowing that I am hurt—bitterly hurt—and that I would give a thousand pounds just now to punch Barach's head, and have done with it, instead of—well, instead of having to express my displeasure in a more gentlemanly manner."

"What do you mean?" asked I, anxiously.

"Nothing actionable, Miss Verney; I will keep my fists off him. Didn't you see what good friends we are? And I will hire no masked myrmidon to stab him on the knifeboard of a City 'bus.'"

It was the most saturnine playfulness I had ever listened to, I thought, as I watched his quivering nostril and set mouth. He went on—

"What stuff I'm talking! Revenge went out of date with 'pistols and coffee for two,' didn't it? It is a shabby substitute to black-ball a fellow at a club. We'll 'drink fair, whatever we do.'"

"What are you going to do?" asked I, moved out of prudence, out of reticence.

Tom was excited, or he would not, I think, have answered so freely.

"I'll shut up his 'Bouches du Rhône,' if I can."

"Do you call that fair?" cried I hotly.

"Yes. I never thought much of the plan; but it was no affair of mine, and I held my tongue about it. Now I will simply express my opinion that the affair isn't sound. What can be fairer than that? After all, what harm can my opinion do? I am only a young man, like himself, and not credited with half his brains. You know enough of the City to know that there are plenty of young men there, and that they are all quite at liberty to express their opinion, and that everybody else is quite at liberty to pay no attention to it. It is quite fair."

"It is not fair. You are not like other young men—you are now practically the head of a great house of business, with strong influence at your command; you might make or mar a speculative scheme of this kind, so far as its success in London goes. And, if you smash up this, you will destroy the very dearest hope of a man's heart."

I had gone, in my vehemence, farther than I meant to go; I had betrayed an interest, a knowledge I ought to have kept to myself.

But Tom did not look at me—he only asked quietly—

“Has he not destroyed mine?”

Now I knew that the blow Tom had received was a hard one; but I knew also that a disappointment to him was not to be compared with a disappointment to passionate, sensitive Eugene.

“Was it his fault that he was first in the field? Do you think it was by his wish that Lady Kate encouraged your attention? You are unreasonable, Mr. Godfrey.”

“I dare say I am, Miss Verney; I dare say most men are when they find they have been made fools of. I shall be better to-morrow, I have no doubt.”

And he turned the conversation, leaving me in doubt and dread and shame. Would he be reasonable, and leave Eugene and his Bouches du Rhône alone? Had he found out by my unguarded eagerness what I most wished to hide?

That night, when I was alone, I was angry with Eugene; it forced itself upon me that the man I loved had made but a poor figure vacillating between the woman he loved and the woman to whom he was bound. Yet I pitied him too—a strong man bound, or a man strongly bound—with a tender pity that broke down my anger and my pride, and reduced me to weak wailing. For hope had crept into my thoughts lately—the hope that he was free, and that he would come to me with the love and support and sympathy my heart ached so for sometimes, as I sat alone in this great miserable house that its mistress had truly called haunted. And now hope had fled out again, and I must do the best I could without it. But, put away the thought as I would, there was a dull weight on my spirits that I could not shake off. I began to feel a cowardly dread of the long morning chatter to Mr. Godfrey, and I got through it with an effort that left me inert and spiritless for the rest of the day.

A week passed like this. I was standing, on the next half-holiday, by the pond, staring vacantly at the swans, with the “*Divina Commedia*” in my hand—but I was beyond self-improvement just then—when Hubert came through the shrubbery towards me. I had

not thought much about him lately, I am afraid, having been wrapt up in other cares: and I repented when I saw his kind wistful eyes fixed on my face. He knew that I was unhappy, and he did not dare to try to comfort me; and it was best that he should not dare. But yet, in my weak, selfish depression, I felt that it would have comforted me to hear him say again, "Guinny, don't cry."

I stretched my mouth into the caricature of a smile, and tried to be sprightly.

"Swans go excellently with poetry"—holding out my book.

"And were the sighs for the swans, or for the poetry, Miss Verney?"

"Was I sighing? Oh, then the sighs were for the swans!"

"Can you spare one for me?"

"You are getting very poetical. You can sigh for yourself, you know, and the swans can't; and I don't think you have anything to sigh about, except the want of something to do."

"You have hit it exactly, Miss Verney," said he seriously. "I really do want something to do; I came to consult you about it. Loafing is a poor trade for a man, isn't it? And I do no good at all in the City; I hate it. The question is, what could I do any good at? I'm not a bad whip, and I should make a very fair groom, and I should be rather a dashing cab-driver; but you would cut me if I turned cabby, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, perhaps I should. But are you in earnest, or not? For I know you don't mean quite all that."

"I am in earnest, awfully in earnest; only I'm at my wits' end for an idea. I thought you would help me."

I turned to consider. He was not an easy person to fit with a profession.

"Couldn't you get into a Government office?" I said at last. "It would not be as bad as the City, you know, and I don't think you would have too much to do."

"No, I should have to cut pencils, and come away at four o'clock; I think I could do that. I'll speak to the governor about it. Anything is better than that eternal Crau and Bouches du Rhône."

"How is that getting on?" asked I, turning from him to look at the pond again.

"Oh, it is very shaky now, I believe! The Scudarossas—you know Ocharlie Scudarossa; he often comes here to dinner; he is a great chum of Tom's—well, they won't have anything to do with it, and the shares are going down like—" He stopped as he saw me start, and, moving a few steps, he looked into my face. "Miss Verney, is it possible that you—you have shares in it?"

"No—oh, no!" said I. "But some friends——"

"You had better advise them to sell out on the first opportunity. Of course they can't just now; but the shares will probably go up again for a time. The directors are making tremendous efforts; but sooner or later the crash must come—there is such a strong clique formed against it. You have heard who the prime mover is? A young man named Barach. He looks quite haggard. The thing has fallen through once already. When it fails again, people say he will go mad."

I had turned from him again, that he might not see by my face what I felt; but as these last words fell upon my ears my strength seemed suddenly to leave me. I stretched out my hand blindly as if to save myself, for I felt that I must fall; and Hubert stepped quickly to my side. I collected myself enough to refuse his support and to walk to a garden-seat close by. He followed me without a word.

"I am all right again now, thank you," said I. "I think I over-tired myself by my long walk this morning." And I looked up, trying to smile.

But my eyes fell when I saw his face, pained, bewildered, and yet full of pity. My poor excuse was useless; he had understood. Still he said nothing.

Ashamed and miserable, I was rising to go, when he sat down beside me and took my hand to detain me. His voice was hoarse and gruff.

"Miss Verney, those are only idle tales, you know; they always say a man is going off his head in the City if he looks white when times are bad. I shouldn't wonder if they were to tide over, after all. The—he—Barach"—he jerked out the name—"is just the man to carry a thing through, in spite of the prophets."

I could not answer him; the tears had sprung to my eyes at the

generous words; but still I sat motionless, with my head turned away unable to see, feeling the kindly, comforting clasp of his hand round mine, and silently struggling with the impulse to burst into passionate sobbing between my shame, my gratitude, and my sorrow. He said nothing, but waited for me to speak, with my right hand in both his now; I drove back my tears, and, regaining my self-command, turned round to him and made an effort to undo the effects of my weakness by saying lightly—

"I have been making myself ridiculous, and all about nothing; for of course they exaggerate these things. My acquaintance with Mr. Barach is very slight, but enough to make me interested in his career; and the idea of his brain giving way shocked me horribly, I confess."

My tone grew more and more composed as I went on, and I almost flattered myself that I was leading him off the scent of my miserably deep interest in Eugene. But, as I finished, he let my hand go sharply, and said, with the old passion and fire that he had repressed ever since that day when we walked over the common together—

"Guinny, Guinny, don't tell lies to me! You trusted me once; can't you trust me again? I am not jealous—I have no right to be jealous. If it is Barach who has had the luck to win you, I wish him well for your sake; though how he can care a rap for the success or failure of the Bouches du Rhône when he has the love of——"

"Lady Catherine Hyde," said I quietly, but with every muscle of my face quivering in spite of myself. "He is lucky to be engaged to one of the beauties of the day."

My voice quavered as I finished. Hubert was dumb with surprise. Before he could recover, I turned to him and burst out—

"Don't ask me any more questions. Don't say anything unkind about him, or about her, or about anybody. You cannot say I have not trusted you now, though it was half against my will. Now I must go."

I got up quickly; but he got up too. I was afraid of a fiery tirade against Eugene; but there was not a trace of passion, nothing but deepest tenderness in his voice, as he said—

"Don't run away, my own little sister Guinny. You had much better stay here with your book and the swans than go and cry by yourself in the schoolroom. I'm going. I'd give the sight of my eyes and the use of my limbs and everything else I prize on the earth to comfort you; but I cannot, and I must leave you to the swans. Only it will be a comfort presently, perhaps, to think there is an idle scamp in the world who is thinking of you every moment of his worthless life. Heaven bless you, Guinny!" And he bent down and kissed my hand very gently, and left me, with the tears—I could see them through my own—in his kind gray eyes.

Comfort? It was sorry comfort to think of the pain I was causing this true-hearted lad to suffer. Remorse at the wrong I had unintentionally done him now swelled my unhappiness; and I cried until I could cry no more. Yet, as I laid my head wearily upon my pillow that night, into my selfish heart crept a soothing feeling that I was not all uncared for. Elsie cared whether I was "sick, or sad, or merry, or well," and so did Hubert.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER anxiety had been growing up for me lately. Poor little Elsie found the restraint of life as a resident governess too irksome, and had taken lodgings a little way from her pupils, so that, after her daily teaching, she might have her evenings to herself. She was working again at the South Kensington Art Schools, and again at—Shakspeare. And at last came a piteous letter, imploring me "not to be angry," but she could not go on living this "gray life," struggling on with the teaching which she hated and the drawing which would not pay—alone and without friends. There was only one way out of it, a way she would have taken long ago but for me; but now, she thought, being all alone, she ought to choose her own career; she wanted to—she must go on the stage.

It was a great blow to me, though I was not quite unprepared for it. For I had long known the way her wishes went, and, great as I knew the difficulties and dangers of the life of an actress to be,

I hardly doubted her strength any more than her courage. But yet I feared that the terrible publicity of such a life must rub the bloom off a woman's nature; and to think that Elsie might possibly become less feminine, less modest, was torture to me. And we should drift away from each other—that would be inevitable; and my heart sank. I had looked forward, vaguely but hopefully, to a time not far off, when we should “drudge” no more in the schoolroom, but have become practised enough, she in her drawing, I with my writing, to support ourselves together. That vaguest ambition of all, to live in the world of wealth and wit and leisure, was only a dream; but this other, more modest one, had seemed within the reach of fact. The hope of it had been more to me than I had thought; for, now that it was slipping away, I felt desolate.

I wrote to her, entreating her to take courage, to wait just a little while, until I came back to her at Easter; I am afraid sorrow and disappointment made the tone of my letter bitter. It was harder than ever to be cheerful after this. I felt that the children must think me harsh, and the feeling made me more wretched still. Hubert noticed my depression, and must have put it down, poor fellow, to “that fellow Barach;” but his compassion only made him shy, and he spoke less to me. Tom noticed my sullenness too; but, not being in love with me, he made a better guess at the cause of it. One day, as I sat in a corner of the drawing-room after luncheon, with a book, he brought the illustrated papers and sat down beside me.

“I have seen them, thank you.”

“Ah, it doesn't matter! Bringing them was only a flimsy pretext for coming to talk to you. You have hardly spoken to me, or to any one, lately, and I have begun to be afraid that the gloom of this horrible house, with its cupboardfuls of skeletons, is grinding the brightness out of you. May I ask for your confidence so far? Are they our troubles only which are making you look so sad?”

He spoke so kindly that tears, which, in my late maudlin state, had always been too ready, welled up into my eyes.

“No, no; it is nothing. I am only discontented and——”

I paused for a word, and he went on gravely—

“Is it anything about your sister?”

I started.

"Ah! I am not a conjurer, Miss Verney; but I know that you have only one sister, and that you are very fond of each other; so I guessed, not out of idle curiosity, you may be sure. Do you want a week's holiday to go and see her?"

I shook my head sadly.

"No, thank you; Christmas is not long past, and Easter not far off; I had better wait. It is only that she is lonely, and finds her life dreary; so I, her elder sister, of course have to give her a lecture on contentment with her lot. But it must be dull for a girl of nineteen, alone in lodgings in London."

"Good heavens! I should think so! Why do you let her live so?"

"What can I do? She likes even that better than what she calls 'bondage and slavery' as a resident governess. She gets her evenings free to work at the art-schools."

"It is too hard a life for a young girl; she ought not to do it. But what pluck you both have! I should like to see her and compare her with you."

"I hope you will not, as I should suffer horribly in the comparison."

"I am sorry to see that you are jealous, Miss Verney," he answered, with much gravity. "You have piqued my curiosity. Look here—will you trust to my discretion, and let me give your sister a lecture for you?"

I burst out laughing.

"Mr. Godfrey, you cannot be in earnest. I have told you my sister lives alone."

"I will lie in wait for her, if you will only tell me where she is to be found. If you won't, I shall be forced to make inquiries at the art-schools, as if your sister were 'wanted' for some crime. Without joking, I want you to entrust your next letter to your sister to me, instead of to the postman; and you can pack a box of camellias for her, which I undertake to deliver safely, and I swear she will think me the nicest postman in the country, as I shall come straight from you."

I hesitated a little at this strange request; but he insisted, and

further asked me not to warn her of his coming. "Don't spoil my fun, Miss Verney," he pleaded. So I did entrust my next letter to his care, gave him the address in Onslow Square where she taught, and told him at what time she left in the afternoon. He got one of the gardeners to pack a little cardboard box full of hot-house flowers, and went off to town that morning with a laugh full of mischief at my still half-bewildered face.

Two days afterward, I received the following letter from Elsie.

"MY DEAREST GUINNY,—How could you call Mr. Tom Godfrey rough and brusque? And how could you be so mean as to let me be taken at a disadvantage? If you had warned me, I should have arrayed myself in my nearest approach to gorgeous raiment—*i. e.*, my black silk, now rather shiny at the seams—and done credit to the House of Verney. Instead of which he will certainly inform his friends that you belong to a family of rag-pickers. I had just left my sweet charges—Lily had been dreadfully naughty and tiresome—and I was feeling cross as I walked down the square, when I noticed a gentleman sauntering along towards me, who seemed to know me. Just as I was going to pass him, he stopped and raised his hat. 'I beg pardon; Miss Verney, I believe? My name is Godfrey. Perhaps this will introduce me better;' and he handed me your letter. Guinny, I confess I was 'flabbergasted like.' I muttered something indistinctly gracious, and put out my hand for the letter in true underbred confusion. For, oh, Guinny, I had on such gloves! Those old brown ones; they are now in an advanced stage of decomposition. A lady is always known by her boots and her gloves, you know. 'I hope you will entrust me with an answer when you have read it, Miss Verney,' said he. 'Your sister has sent you a few flowers; may I carry them home for you?' 'Oh, thank you, it will not trouble me to carry them! I am not going home now; I am going to have tea at the Museum to-night, and go to a lecture afterwards.' He asked if he might go with me, and if I would show him where the refreshment-room was, as it was 'so very convenient to know where to get a sandwich.' 'Where not to get one,' thought I; but I did not say so, for I did not want to send him away. But what would he think of the students?

And what would the students think of him? It was impossible to hope that he would pass for my brother. I must say he looked nobly unconscious of my rags; but I am sure I must have looked conscious of his new gloves. Why, not a male frequenter of the refreshment-room even knows his own number! However, we ran the gauntlet of fifty faces that I knew, and sat down to tea at one of the little marble tables. He ate three of those awful rolls, and drank two cups of that terrible tea. I am sure his digestion must be impaired for life. I was so sorry for him, for he was so nice, and he was so much interested in you. He asked if I would mind showing him a little of the Museum, as he did not know his way about very well; so I gave up the lecture and showed him everything. I took him into the 'opera-box,' to give him a 'bird's-eye view,' and we had a long talk in front of the monster violoncello; and he spoke so generously of you and the good influence you had over everybody, that, if it had not been for a policeman, I should have embraced him. Then he insisted upon seeing me home; and, at the door, we parted with as fervent a handshake as if we had been friends for years. I have finished my 'Diana,' and am doing a head from the life. I will write again in a day or two, but have no time for more now.

"Your loving sister,

ELSIE

"P. S.—I must tell you—inside the Museum we met Mr. Burns, waiting about with a book he had promised to lend me; and he looked so grimy, although he had washed his hands in honor of me, that just for the first moment—oh, Guinny, it was mean!—I thought I would not see him. But I repented, and, apologising to Mr. Godfrey, shook hands with him; and the poor, dear, kind little fellow looked sunbeams upon me with one eye and lightning and thunderbolts at Mr. Godfrey with the other; but I think the thunderbolts hit me instead, for I nearly cried to see him look so much hurt. He is always so kind."

I wished Mr. Burns at—the Royal Academy.

Tom did not often go to church; but he went the Sunday after this, and, returning, he walked with me.

"Miss Elsie is more confiding than you are, Miss Verney."

I looked up surprised. He went on quietly—

"I have promised to send all the clerks into the stalls at her *début*, and to offer a junior partnership to the one who splits the greatest number of gloves."

I was aghast.

"You are looking elder-sisterly, Miss Verney, and you are manufacturing thunder for poor Miss Elsie for having been so frank. But it was not her fault. I gently insinuated that I thought you were too hard upon her, and she thought I knew more than I did; but still I think it was clever of me to find it all out, for your sister is quick of fence."

"So you have taken advantage of this unfairly-won knowledge to encourage an ignorant girl to rush into all sorts of peril!"

"Ignorant! I have never met a young girl who understood the world better; and I assure you I neither discouraged nor encouraged her. She had made up her mind calmly, without any flourish of trumpets, and for me to use either persuasion or dissuasion would have been to take a liberty. But I cannot help saying that I admire her courage, and that I wish her all success on the stage, if she takes to it."

"She is not your sister, of course," said I bitterly.

"No. And Hubert and I are not your brothers, and that is why it is all the same to you whether we sink or swim; is it not, Miss Verney? Just as little as you care for us, just so little do I care for you and Miss Elsie."

He meant what he said—that was Tom's strong point. I was softened, and presently I listened to what he called "reason"—*i. e.*, an array of arguments to prove that every one capable of making a choice has a right to choose his own career, and will probably choose what is best for him. What he said was not without both truth and triteness; it left me half convinced, but not half comforted.

To the great relief of his sons and myself, Mr. Godfrey had begun to get better. But, unluckily, Mrs. Godfrey, who had been cowed into submission and silence by his late fierceness and irritability, no sooner felt her dread of his outbreaks subsiding than she gave way again, like a spoilt child, to fits of peevish fretfulness, all

the more violent from the restraint she had lately put upon herself. It was a dangerous indulgence. Her husband bore with her sullenly; and this state of things kept the onlookers, his sons and myself, in a state of painful tension. Not for long. The improvement in Mr. Godfrey was not yet of a settled kind; but the heavy black cloud which had hung over him of late rose sometimes and left him almost his usual self; and he would then go to the City or to the "meet," as usual. But, after a few days' relief, the shadow would pass over him again, and I had to resume my strange duty of chattering to him for an hour or two after breakfast.

One morning, when he was at his worst, and I was trying to persuade him to drive out instead of going to the City, Mrs. Godfrey came in. She too was at her worst, I could see, from the discontented look on her fair face. Her tact seemed to have forsaken her of late. I could not warn her; but I trembled for the effect of a fit of fretfulness on her husband's gloomy mood. Her opening took me rather by surprise—

"Are you always going to take up half Miss Verney's morning, Thurstan?"

He turned to look at me—I must indeed have looked miserable between my nervous fatigue and my dread of what was coming.

"Poor little woman! I am too exacting. But she cheers me up so. She has been trying to persuade me to drive to Bromley, instead of going to the City."

"And of course you are going to follow her advice," said Mrs. Godfrey, with peevish emphasis.

"I believe it would do me good. Can you go with me? I want to have some one to talk to me."

"You know I am going to Mrs. Prior's."

"Then make it a holiday, and I will take Miss Verney, if she will come. We'll tuck the children in somewhere, and then no objection can be made."

But here the tears welled up into Mrs. Godfrey's beautiful eyes.

"Miss Verney—always Miss Verney!" she sobbed.

I knew so well that this absurd jealousy was only a freak, which she would laugh at and be ashamed of in an hour, that it did not trouble me much; but the effect of her capricious tears upon her

husband was sudden and terrible. He started up, with clenched fists, then checked himself and only said bitterly—

“Very well—very right, Leila! After letting this child wear herself out in trying to keep me from going mad—I know what a tax it is upon her, though I am selfish enough to accept it, and you are glad enough to get me off your hands for a little while—it is time to warn her that I am a fascinating elderly Lothario. But there—what humbug! Never mind, child; I won’t tease you any more to-day. I’ll go to town. And”—turning to his wife—“I shall not be home to dinner.” He left the room and, soon after, the house.

I was so much distressed and frightened to see him go off in that black mood that at first I could scarcely try to calm the miserable sobbing wife. In a few moments she was begging my pardon, as I had expected, for her silly words, saying she was so wretched that she scarcely knew what she said, and trifles irritated her. After pouring out my sympathy—I was indeed very sorry for her—I gently told her that, if she were to speak like that again, I should have to go away, as, absurd as they were, no girl could stay where such things were said to her. She drew me to her then, absolutely trembling, and begged me not to think of it again, and not to talk of leaving her. And so, sadly enough, she let me go back to my work in the schoolroom.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEITHER Mr. Godfrey nor his eldest son came home to dinner that evening, and Mrs. Godfrey presently sent Hubert to ask me to come into the drawing-room.

“She is very low-spirited, and it is of no use for me to try to amuse her,” said he. “It drives every idea out of my head to see her sitting there looking so wretched. She is anxious about my father. I hope to Heaven she won’t provoke him when he comes home, for, to tell you the truth, he alarmed us all at the office to-day.”

"There is nothing to be done but to try to calm and cheer her," said I. "You must second me, Mr. Hubert. Try to look as if you were enjoying your evening."

"I shall enjoy my evening," he answered promptly, looking down into my face as he opened the drawing-room door.

He seemed to find two easier to amuse than one, for his spirits rose to boyish fun as he sat and chatted to us; and, with a little help from the piano, which Hubert very kindly accompanied on the lutes, the evening passed away easily. When we went up-stairs, Mrs. Godfrey took me to her room, and said good night reluctantly. It was clear that she was in fear of her husband's return, and living on a hope that he might spend the night in town. At last, as I was leaving her, she sprang forward, and half whispered, with her eyes glistening and a feverish flush on her cheeks—

"Leave your door ajar, Miss Verney, please; and if I call—oh, do come!"

I said I would, and tried to soothe her.

"You think I am nervous and foolish; but you don't know. I've seen him look before as he looked to-day, and, and—he threatened to kill me! Oh, you must go, you must go, or I shall cry again; and then he will be angry!"

So I left her. But, on my way to my room, I met Hubert, and I at once spoke out the fear that was in my mind.

"She is so frightened; she is afraid he will—hurt her." I whispered the last words, ashamed of having to say this to his own son.

"He shall not, if I can help it, Miss Verney. I dare say he will stay in town to-night; Tom is going to, I know. At any rate, I will be on the watch; so don't be frightened."

"Thank you. Good night." And I hastened past him to my room.

I knew I could not sleep yet—my own heart seemed to echo every fear and every feeling of the unhappy woman I had just left. Every sound in the great house made me start, as it must have made her quiver too. Once or twice I opened the window, letting a rush of cold air into the warm room, because I thought I heard the sound of wheels. At last I distinctly heard a man's step in the verandah.

Could it be Mr. Godfrey? Again I opened the window, very softly, and then I smelt the perfume of a cigar, and heard Hubert's voice singing two lines of "Simon the Cellarer" over and over again, after the manner of men who have no "ear." The bathos of this discovery helped to calm my nervous excitement. Smiling at my absurd fancies, I was closing the window, when it creaked, and Hubert stepped out into the moonlight, cigar in hand, and looking up, gave me the military salute.

"On guard," he said softly.

I nodded; and, hissing back, "You will take cold," I shut the window. I was able to laugh at the extravagance of my fancies by this time; but yet, remembering my promise to Mrs. Godfrey, I did not undress, but put on my dressing-gown, set my door ajar, and threw myself on my bed, with the quilt over me. In a few minutes I was asleep.

I awoke, and sprang to my feet with a horrible feeling that I had been roused by a scream. The fire was still bright; I heard no sound but the ticking of my watch; I looked at it; it was one o'clock. I was going to lock my door and prepare for bed, when, with my fingers upon the handle, I heard, in very truth, a shrill scream from the other end of the corridor—and another and another. For one instant I dropped upon my knees, then flew straight along the passage towards Mrs. Godfrey's room. As I ran, I heard more cries; but they sounded fainter; the door had been shut. A few steps from it stood the housekeeper, wringing her hands and moaning. She caught me as I passed.

"Oh, don't go in, ma'am! The master is mad; he is indeed, ma'am! There is no sight for a young lady in there!"

For one moment I hesitated, with shrinking cowardice. I could hear the thud of blows, Mr. Godfrey cursing, his wife sobbing—I saw that frightened servants were gathering at the end of the passage, whispering, the women threatening hysterics, the men in front, less timid, if not more curious. I turned quickly to the housekeeper.

"Mrs. French, don't let the servants come near unless they are wanted."

Glad to have something to do, she walked up to them, and I saw

them drawing back under her sharp words as I opened the door and entered, shutting it after me.

The sight before me seemed to me at first like a ghastly dream, too horrible for reality. I saw Hubert, with Mrs. Godfrey clinging to him, her long golden hair half hanging down her back, and on her white dressing-gown a deep red stain; she was unhurt; the blood was trickling from a gash in Hubert's forehead. He was shielding the trembling woman from the blows which his frenzied father aimed at her with the butt-end of a hunting-whip; so the blows fell on him. Mr. Godfrey faced the door, and, seeing me, paused for a moment—there was no recognition in the glare of his eyes. I stood for a moment paralysed with terror; then I sprang to his side as he raised the hunting-whip once more, and, clasping both hands round his uplifted arm, tried with the whole weight of my weak little frame to drag it down. The sight of me unmanned Hubert.

"Go away—go, Guinny! For Heaven's sake, go; my darling!" he burst out.

But I still clung, stammering incoherent pleading words, to his unhappy father, who let his arm drop, while the fury in his face gradually changed into a fixed, dull stare. Hubert took advantage of this to lead his step-mother to the door. Mr. Godfrey started forward, as if to detain her.

"Let her go; do let her go," I pleaded, still holding his arm, stepping in front of the great strong man, who could have brushed me out of his way like a fly.

"Let her go to——" He broke off suddenly as he looked down at me, a ray of intelligence in his eyes.

"Child, child, you have no business here; and yet—Heaven bless you!—you have prevented mischief perhaps. Hubert, I'm sorry, my boy. You were right, Hubert"—with a bitter imprecation.

"Don't, father," urged Hubert.

Mr. Godfrey was not quite collected; his tone changed abruptly with every passing thought. He looked down at me again.

"No. Forgive me, child; I'm not myself. Now go, dear; I will not do more harm to any one to-night, I promise you. Good night!"

I shook his now trembling hand, and left him, as Hubert did a

minute after. Mrs. Godfrey's maid was waiting outside to take me to her mistress, whom I found in one of the spare rooms, trembling and sobbing on the bed, with the housekeeper beside her. When she was a little quieter, Mrs. French and I left her with her maid, who was to sleep on the sofa; and in the corridor we met Hubert, looking, by the light of my candle, haggard and ghastly, with that bleeding cut on his fair forehead.

"How is she—and you?" he began.

But I could not help a shudder as I looked up at his face; and he stepped hastily back, reddening, and putting his hand up over the wound.

"I beg your pardon; I—I——"

"You must have it dressed, sir," said the housekeeper.

"No, no, thanks, Mrs. French; I'll trouble nobody. I'll be my own doctor."

Mrs. French was a discreet person.

"You had much better trust to us, sir. If Miss Verney will bathe your forehead——"

He turned quickly to me.

"Will you? No, no; it is a sickening sight, I know."

I could not refuse, though this was my maiden trial at doctoring. However, under Mrs. French's directions, I got through the bathing and the plastering very well; he sat quiet and silent under my trembling fingers.

"Do I hurt you?" I asked once, anxiously.

"No," he answered quietly. "Do it slowly, though, please."

And I did. I was so anxiously careful that I took twice the time an experienced person would have taken; yet, when it was over, he asked—

"What! Done already?"

We were in Mrs. Godfrey's boudoir. As Mrs. French carried away the healing appliances, he got up.

"It is only saints who do noble and generous things for the abstract love of doing good, isn't it?" he asked gravely.

"Yes, I believe so," said I, surprised.

"And all the miserable sinners now on earth who do good, do it, partly at least, for love of the unworthy object?"

"I suppose so."

"Thank Heaven you are not a saint, Guinevere! You have done something for each one of us, and I think you must love Hawkstone a little by this time. You couldn't easily root all the wicked and turbulent Godfreys out of your heart now, could you, Guinevere?"

The tears were in my eyes.

"No, no, not one," cried I, impulsively.

"Not one? So you don't care for us only in the lump, Guinevere, but you feel an individual interest in the blackest of us, do you—or don't you?"

I was losing my composure under the deepening earnestness of his tone.

"Yes, yes, indeed, of course I do. Now good night, Mr. Hubert; I must go."

I held out my hand. He took both my hands in his, and bent down towards me, whispering—

"Guinevere, I have been devoured by envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness lately; but I would not change places to-night with any man—any man in the world. Oh, Guinevere, I wonder if I shall ever feel again as I felt when you flung yourself upon my father's arm, to save me a blow?"

I drew my hands away, blushing and confused. I ought to have assured him that my interference was on Mrs. Godfrey's behalf, that it was a natural action which made gratitude uncalled for: but I could not begin a connected sentence, a strange hesitation had seized me.

"Good night," I faltered, and hurried from the room.

When I again stood by the fire in my own room, as I had stood an hour and a half before, when Mrs. Godfrey's screams had just awakened me, I felt as if the changes of years had passed over me. I had just finished my hundred years' sleep and felt no inclination for any more. Nor could I think at first. My head was ringing with voices, harsh, shrill, tender, and grave. Once I started, thinking I heard a scream, and again when I fancied I heard footsteps in the passage. When I grew calmer, my thoughts went to Hubert. Thoughts? No. I only heard again his passionate cry "Go away, Guinny. For Heaven's sake, go, my darling!" or his voice, low in

my ear, saying, "I would not change places to-night with any man in the world!" What had I done? Had I given him rash encouragement? Had I let him think I could ever care for him as he cared for me? I hoped not. I had let him call me by my Christian name; but he always dropped the formal "Miss Verney" when he was excited, and I believed it would be unwise prudery to draw his attention to this, as he seemed himself unconscious of it. Was I right, or was I wrong? And had I hurt him by my abrupt "good night"? So my thoughts and fancies merged into dreams.

The next day Mr. Godfrey was ill, and his physician was sent for. He said it was low fever, brought on by cold and—imprudence, but nothing alarming at present. He even hinted that it was a good thing, as it might save him from something far worse, an illness being the only thing that could bring him under the doctor's control. Remorseful for his savage attack upon his wife at a time when he was hardly master of his own actions, Mr. Godfrey received graciously her timid attentions, which both Hubert and I encouraged her to pay. I guessed from her talk that Mr. Godfrey had found out the story of those unlucky letters of hers, and that jealousy had added to his fury on that terrible night. With the pertinacity of a weak brain, she had scarcely yet overcome her suspicion that it was Hubert who had betrayed her; but, knowing this, he patiently tried to win her shy confidence; and at last he seemed to have succeeded. He then exerted himself to induce her to bear patiently with her husband; Mr. Godfrey's illness seconded his persuasions by exciting in her a feeling of womanly tenderness, which was, however, rather fitful. Such as it was, we all counted upon it hopefully; for, with all his faults, Mr. Godfrey was neither cold, ungenerous, nor unresponsive. What outsiders could delicately do, Tom, Hubert, and I did without discussion, but each knowing perfectly well that all three were engaged in a common work. Since that stirring night's work, both brothers had paid me all homage short of worship. I felt humbled by it, as we all must do when we feel conscious of being overrated; yet it was pleasant to know how strong their friendship was. Tom was demonstratively kind, Hubert had grown shy again; it was only when we were all together that he spoke out freely to me as he used to do.

When Mr. Godfrey had begun to get better, he asked his wife one day to let me come and see him. She sent Hubert with the message. He followed me softly into the sick-room, and remained standing behind the bed, holding a glass, into which his step-mother was pouring some mixture. I thought Mr. Godfrey looked very little the worse for his illness, and I said so.

"Ah, that is because I'm nearly well again now! But I looked very bad indeed a little while ago; didn't I, Leila?"

"Well," answered his wife, "I think you did."

"This little sceptic doesn't believe I have been ill. Where have you been all this time, Miss Verney, that you never even sent kind inquiries?"

"I have been absorbed in the frivolities of the schoolroom, Mr. Godfrey."

He had not yet got back the strength of his voice, but the old mischievous spirit was in it.

"There is pathos in that flippant answer. You can't afford to waste much more of your spring-time, exposed on all sides to the withering influence of grammar and Mrs. Markham, or you will give up looking pretty, and take to looking clever. And you mustn't do that. As soon as I get up again, I am going to look for a husband for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Godfrey," said I, with my cheeks tingling—this was not the sort of badinage I cared for, with Hubert within hearing.

His father did not know he was there; he went on—

"Mrs. Godfrey and I are much better able to choose for you than you are for yourself; but we are good enough not to leave your own tastes quite out of the question."

"You are really very kind," said I, crimson and ironical.

"I am going to bring down a young man whom I think in every way suitable, and you are not to be prejudiced against him. He is very clever and plucky, and has just succeeded in floating an immense scheme, after working through tremendous opposition."

Surely he must mean Eugene! I was trembling, almost stammering, as I interrupted him.

"Thank you; I think I would rather choose for myself."

Mr. Godfrey looked at me, smiling kindly.

"Don't be offended, little woman, by my teasing. I am not all in fun, you know. You are full of care for others! you ought to have some one to take care of you. Shut up in the schoolroom, you never see anybody but Hubert and Tom—and you are far too good to be thrown away on either of my drunken boys."

At these terrible words, I glanced, against my will, at poor Hubert, whose eyes were fixed upon me with a pathetic look of longing and despair which haunted me for many a day.

"They are not that! Don't call them that!" I cried.

"Ah, I know what your influence has done for them, child. Tom may stand, perhaps; but Hubert——. You cannot expect to cure a vice as strong as that—hereditary." He was speaking gravely enough now.

A servant came to the door, announcing the doctor. Hubert abruptly went out, and I followed. He walked quickly before me along the corridor and down the stairs, with his head bent, and went straight into the study. I heard him turn the key.

As for me, I walked lingeringly down the stairs, my heart aching so for the poor lad that I could scarcely keep my lips from calling to him. I walked mechanically into the schoolroom, looked out of the window to see that the children were in sight, and remained staring out blankly, my ears painfully, involuntarily alert for any sound from the next room. The walls were thick—I could hear nothing—but the anxious life I had lately led had shaken my nerves, and now my frightened fancy began to work and to picture horrible scenes in the quiet room where the hot-tempered young man had shut himself in. As if fascinated, I drew nearer and nearer to the door, listening until I shivered at the silence, and heard my own breath in quick gasps. I could bear the agony no longer. With sudden resolution I knocked sharply at the door, flushing at my own boldness as soon as I had done so. I was shocked to be answered by a voice quite unlike Hubert's—

"What do you want? Come in." I hesitated. "Come in, come in!" he repeated impatiently.

I turned the handle, and went in. Hubert was standing with his back to the fireplace, his hands in his pockets, an unlighted ci-

gar between his teeth, his head still bent, and his eyes staring at the floor.

"I thought I locked," he began, as he heard the door open. He stopped short on seeing me, and mechanically threw his unlighted cigar into the fireplace. But the hard expression of his face did not soften; he only exclaimed, "You!" in a kind of dull surprise.

But the sight of him moved me as nothing had ever moved me before. I was thrown quite off my guard. I started forward, with my hands stretched out towards him.

"Oh, Hubert, Hubert!" I cried, my voice tremulous with pity; then, as I saw that my words melted his apathy in a moment, and brought the light to his eyes, I stopped, abashed, and put my hand on the back of a chair.

He threw himself upon the seat that he might look up into my face, and, holding my quivering hand in its place with both his, he whispered—

"Then you do care for me, 'drunken boy,' as he calls me, Guinevere?"

"He does not know you, or he would never have said so, Hubert," said I earnestly. "He will find out some day that he has a pair of noble sons, generous and manly and loyal——"

"Loyal? Yes, Guinevere, that is true. He has made me distrust myself, and with good reason; but, by Heaven, Guinevere, you may trust me. Listen, only listen; let me tell you I love you—I only ask you to listen, my darling! My love for you puts new strength into me; and, when you say a sweet, kind word to me, as you did just now, I feel as if I could go on worshipping you for a hundred years, even if I were never to see you again. Oh, my darling, are you going? Have I frightened you? Have I been rough? I meant to speak so gently!"

He had not frightened me. I was frightened by the tenderness I felt welling up in my own heart as I listened to him. I told him again to take courage, and to forget his father's unjust words; and then I left him.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALONE in my room that night, with the day's events floating in my mind, I felt puzzled and dismayed by the recollection of that sudden impulse of mine, when I had surprised Hubert by breaking through my usual reserve and calling him, for the first time, by his Christian name. I tried to analyse the feelings which had moved me during the day, though I was still in the whirl of them. However, I drew out—first, joy at hearing of Eugene's final success, and, secondly, consequent readiness to sympathise with others. Then I felt more satisfied. Next, I fell to thinking of Eugene. So he was successful at last, as I felt he would be—indeed, I had felt so sure of it that I received the news with more calmness than I had expected. Ah, and now he would celebrate his success by marrying Lady Kate! I started up, with my heart beating faster. Marry her! Why not? I had known it for so long, it was cowardly to shrink from the thought, wicked to grieve at it. Thank Heaven, I was even now more resigned, much more resigned to the thought of it than I had been a few weeks ago. I had been thrown out of myself, and, in the cares and the fears of the Godfreys, I had been able, in great part, to suppress my own. I could believe now that the heart-ache which, in my first misery, had threatened to be lifelong would wear away in time; and so would Elsie's for Mr. Burns, if she felt any; so certainly would Tom's for Lady Kate—he seemed quite cured already—and so would—Hubert's for me. Would it? Yes, yes, poor lad, I hoped so, I trusted so; of course it would, it must! But—would it? I wondered myself to sleep about it.

When Mr. Godfrey got well, and able to go again to the City, a long-considered plan was finally carried out. This was the establishment of Tom in Paris, in which city Mr. Godfrey had long had a business-branch, which he thought might develop with a clever head like Tom to work it. Tom liked the plan. Having been the real head of the office in London during his father's long indisposition, he did not care, as he expressed it, "to play second whip to my papa again."

"It seems rather like leaving the governor in the lurch, though, Miss Verney," he said to me one day; "for, do you know, I have a strong suspicion that he will never be quite the same man again, at business or anything else; and I'm awfully afraid of his losing his head in any crisis, such as our house, doing a good deal of speculative business, is liable to have. I wish Hubert would give up his humbugging idea of a Government office, and run with the old pack. It is a pity to waste the stuff of a man on biting india-rubber, isn't it?"

"But he seems to think he could do no good in the City?"

"He could if he chose; and I think he is a fool if he doesn't choose. He need not work his head off; but, if he were at hand to take the reins, if needful, out of my father's hands, he is quite sharp enough to pull the coach out of the mire."

Tom had too much tact to ask me again to "use my influence," but I knew that he wished it, and I thought I ought to try. But whenever I thought of approaching the subject a feeling of shyness seized me, and so I put it off from time to time for several days. When, in the first month of my stay at Hawkstone, Hubert had seemed to me only an idle, ill-mannered, dissipated lad, easily led and influenced, I had felt little diffidence in advising and lecturing him; but, now that I recognized in him high and manly qualities, I felt reluctant to give advice, unasked, to a man who treasured every word I uttered. Besides, a change had taken place in our intercourse; he was as gentle and unobtrusive in his manner to me as ever, yet I was losing my freedom of speech with him; just a little stiffness was the result of the reaction from my impulsive conduct during that conversation in the study.

But I broke the ice at last, stammering.

"Then you have no compunction in recommending to me a life that I have told you a thousand times I hate, Miss Verney?" said he, smiling however.

I hesitated, feeling ashamed and doubtful.

"But I think you and Tom are quite right, so I'll try it."

I was astonished at the ease with which I had gained my point.

"I will be in harness to-morrow," he cried energetically, "though there is nothing doing in the City just now—except those Bouches

du Rhône," he added, glancing down at me and blushing like a girl.

I blushed too; but I answered calmly—

"Yes, I am glad that he has succeeded at last. Mr. Barach will be a great man in the City some day, I suppose?"

"Oh, don't you know he is going to 'cut the shop'? His elder brother is just dead, and his father not expected to live; so he will soon be Sir Eugene, and be a great swell in the county."

"Ah, that will just suit Lady Kate!" I felt that Hubert was looking at me penetratingly, but I stood fire this time; I was getting secure. "And she will be called 'brilliant Lady Barach,' and open a *salon*," added I, lightly.

Hubert enjoyed this small joke amazingly; indeed I never remember meeting with so hearty a response to a piece of humor. After I had left him, I heard him singing and whistling indoors and out of doors, never in tune, but never out of temper; and these high spirits set me thinking. He thought I had forgotten Eugene. Ah, he little knew the constancy of a woman! Somehow this last reflection made me blush, all alone as I was, and I took up a book to avoid making any more.

Hubert's decision gave strong satisfaction to his father and to Tom, who lost no time in starting for Paris.

"I suppose it would be too presumptuous of me to ask you to write to me, Miss Verney?" said he. "But will you dictate a page or two now and then to Hubert for me? And then the proprieties will have been strictly observed, and my brother will have had a lesson in composition, of which he stands much in need."

The day before his departure, Tom took a basket of fruit—"With your sister's love"—to Elsie. He had done so several times since their tea at the Museum. I had demurred at first—"You are very kind, and she likes them very much; but we would rather not trouble you to go so far out of your way." But he explained quite simply that Onslow Square was close to Pelham Crescent, where he liked to call sometimes; and I knew what he evidently meant to remind me of, that in the Crescent lived Miss Falconer, for whom he had professed admiration before the appearance of Lady Kate. So I smiled and made no further objection. But I thought it no

breach of faith to mention the story of the Crescent in my next letter to Elsie; it would never do for her to fall in love with Mr. Tom Godfrey.

I missed Tom very much when he went away. He had never had the least diffidence about seeking my society, nor had Hubert had the least diffidence about following him and joining in the conversation. But, now that Tom was gone, he lacked the courage to come to me; and we scarcely did more than exchange a few shy words during the day. As a natural consequence, our intercourse became more and more awkward; I began to drop my eyelids and to feel a hot blush rising in my cheeks when he met me and bade me good night, as he always contrived to do, even when I passed my evenings in the schoolroom.

One evening, when I was in the drawing-room, playing softly on the piano, I overheard part of a playful dialogue between Mr. Godfrey and a lively widow—"And it is a fundamental principle that, if she blushes and looks down, he may feel safe." Hubert was listening to the talk; and, at these words, he glanced at me shyly, with rising color. I played on, with a malicious thought in my mind. Hubert was not in the room when I left it; but on the landing, half-way up the stairs, I met him. With a strange effort, I raised my head and looked straight into his face as I gave him my hand. But, on meeting his eyes, mine faltered and fell, and I felt that I was blushing like a schoolgirl of fifteen at a threadbare compliment.

"Good night," I faltered.

"Good night, my darling Guinevere!" he whispered softly, close to my ear.

A door opened somewhere, and I started away. In a moment more I think he would have kissed me, and Heaven knows whether I could have repulsed him. But at that sound of the door, I snatched my hand away and fled to my room like a hare. When I reached it, I was panting and quivering, and whispering to myself, "Good night, good night." I could not deceive myself now; I could not grieve over my unlucky constancy; if I wanted to lament, it must be over my own fickleness. For I knew, and in spite of my shame it was with a throb of joy that I knew, that Eugene Barach

might marry whom he pleased, and forget me as soon as he pleased, if only Hubert would go on loving me. Inconstant! Was I inconstant? I laughed at the thought. What could that mild affection which had only troubled me at unoccupied moments, or when I was enjoying a fit of general despondency, do against the love which had mastered me now? Was it myself? Was it cold, calm Guinevere Verney who was passionately kissing the hand he had held, and caressing the ear his lips had so nearly touched? Yes, yes; but a new Guinevere, grateful, tender, happy with such a glorified kind of gratitude, tenderness, happiness, that she seemed to have slipped out of earth into heaven. As, with wide-awake eyes, I gazed on the fire—I would not try to go to sleep; no mere sleep-dreams could be so golden as mine; I must enjoy them just a little longer—I thought of my mother, my father, of my darling Elsie, of all my few friends—only just then they seemed a great many—with a new love, a new pity for them, out in the cold there, without Hubert's caring for them a bit! And I laughed aloud at my own silliness. "Good night, good night, good—" I think I went on whispering it until I fell asleep.

But, of course, the morning light brought very different behavior. If I had been coy before, what was I now? It had been difficult to be indifferent and calm while I still believed myself to be only slowly recovering from a hopeless love; but, now that I felt ready to burst into singing when I heard him shout for his boots in the morning, and felt a childish impulse to run away and hide myself when he came into the breakfast-room, I found it quite easy to treat him as if I had known him just a week. I reproached myself for my waywardness every evening, and was wayward again the next day. I could not help it. When Mr. Godfrey's melancholy began to creep over him again, and Hubert stammered out to me his fears about him, the sympathising words that used to be so ready failed me, and Hubert left me, surprised and hurt by my seeming apathy, leaving me vexed to the heart at having wounded him. I think he, poor fellow, never for a moment guessed the cause of my dulness; I believe he put it down to Eugene.

As Mr. Godfrey's irritability increased again, his unhappy wife's old distrust of Hubert awoke afresh. I gathered from her talk to

me that she was angry with him for having dissuaded her from the thought of a separation, which would, she thought, have saved her from a repetition of the scenes of two months ago. I listened quietly, I reasoned, I soothed; but at last, when she touched the old chord and lamented that Hubert was "weak and untrustworthy, and unable to control his own actions, and ought to be under supervision," I took fire, and cried—

"Hubert! Oh, Mrs. Godfrey, remember what he did for——" I stopped.

She only colored, and said discontentedly—

"Of course—of course you stand up for him, Miss Verney. I happen to know that he only dissuaded me from trying to get a separation because he was afraid that a scandal in the house might injure you. So I have no reason to be grateful to him, though you may have."

And she rang the bell for her maid, while I said good night, and left the room sadly. I could believe that that had been one of Hubert's reasons, but that it had not been the sole one I knew. He was too loyal to advise one woman to her own hurt for the sake of another, however he might love the latter. I felt anxious about him. That any one should hate him and wish him harm seemed so horrible, and that person a woman he had helped and protected!

I felt still more uneasy when, a few days before the Easter holidays, Mrs. Fitzgerald came. It seemed as if I were leaving him, careless and unsuspecting, in a camp of enemies. I noticed with alarm that Mr. Godfrey, whose mind seemed to be growing gradually enfeebled, was letting himself slip into Mrs. Fitzgerald's hands; she managed him with much gentleness and cleverness, and Hubert began to repent of his dislike of her, and to be grateful for her kindness to his father. I wondered at his short-sightedness. Not for one moment did I think that her influence, good as it seemed, would prove to be good in the end. This feeling was something more than prejudice. I had watched the effect of her visits upon her daughter's easily-read mind, and I knew she was not to be trusted. I knew that it was by artful praise of me that she was disarming Hubert. With all my heart I wished that Tom were back again—Tom, the only member of the household whom I

knew to be a match for her. She repaid my interest in her; she had that cleverness which prides itself upon "taking in a situation at a glance," and, even without her daughter's help, she could have found out that I loved Hubert and he did not know it, and that Hubert loved me and I did know it, on the very day of her arrival. I believed that, if he had tried his utmost for a *tête-à-tête* with me between her coming and my going away for the Easter holidays, he would have failed—until the last day. I could not refuse to let him take me to the station; the drive was almost a silent one; but, when he had put me into a carriage by myself, and the porters were busy getting my luggage into the van, and Hubert had put my ticket into my hand, I retained his fingers for a minute, to gasp out—

"Listen, listen! Oh, Hubert, be careful! Don't trust her!"

He looked surprised and glad; but the surprise belonged, I think, to the gladness at the tenderness in my voice.

"Not trust who? Mrs. Fitzgerald?"

"Yes, yes!" cried I, getting more eager. "Be serious, please. Don't say it is a woman's prejudice; you know it is something more. Don't trust either of them, for my sake—oh, Hubert, for my sake!"

The train was moving off. My words had taken effect indeed, but not the effect I wanted. He walked a few steps by the side of the moving train, looking into my imploring eyes with a radiance of happiness on his face that struck me dumb. For he had read in mine what for months he would have given his heart's blood to read there.

CHAPTER XV.

ELsie was waiting on the platform at London Bridge, looking very well and very pretty. I could not wait until we got home to attack her about her stage plan, but poured out my wrath in soft undertones in a second-class carriage on the Underground Railway.

"Perhaps you will listen to the defence presently, when you are tired of making out the accusation," murmured she saucily.

Elsie was certainly growing more independent. Could this be through Tom's influence? I wondered, in dismay. When we got to her lodging, I saw on the side-table of her sitting-room a canary in a pretty cage.

"Why, you never told me you had got a bird!" cried I. "And what a handsome cage! You extravagant child!"

"It is not my extravagance; it is Mr. Godfrey's. He gave it to me as a parting *souvenir* before going to Paris," said she mischievously, as she saw the dismay on my face.

"Tom?" cried I.

"I haven't got so far as to call him by his Christian name yet," answered she, still more archly. Then she burst out laughing. "Poor old Guinny! What a burden and care a younger sister is! Isn't she? You think I have lost my erratic heart again, and to Mr. Godfrey, or 'Tom,' as you call him."

But I was really unhappy.

"Oh, Elsie, I ought never to have let him come! And don't you know he is as fickle as the wind, nice and straightforward as he is?"

"Ah, that is why we get on so well together; I'm fickle too."

"When I first went to Hawkstone he admired a Miss Falconer," I continued. "Then he seemed devoted to Lady Catherine Hyde. When he found she was engaged, he threatened to ruin Mr. Barach. Yet now he seems to have forgotten all about her, and he has long since withdrawn his opposition to Mr. Barach and his scheme."

"Ah, and I happen to know why! Mr. Godfrey told me all about it himself."

I was silent with surprise. What had she and Tom not told each other?

"Now, listen, Guinny, and please don't be angry with him or with me," said she, nestling up to me appeasingly. "It seems that he thought, from something you said, that Mr. Barach had treated you badly, and he wanted to know me in order to find out the truth. When, in answer to some discreet questions on his part, I assured him it was not so, he said in that case he would forgive Mr.

Barach for 'saving him from Lady Kate'—those were his own words. I fancy he has got over Lady Kate, Guinny."

In my heart I wished he had not. Elsie took pity on my distress.

"Now you need not be so much vexed, dear; I have only been teasing you. I like Mr. Godfrey very much, and I think he likes me. But he has always distinctly said that his interest in me arose from his affection for you; in fact, I have sometimes thought it would be more courteous of him not to remind me of this so often; and he has treated me not so much like a sister even as like a brother. You know I always tell you the truth, Guinevere, and this is true."

She looked up seriously into my face, and I felt relieved; yes, I could trust Elsie. However, I did not confide in her entirely just at first; I kept the key turned upon one little chamber of my heart; I rather hung back from the accusations of fickleness she might be unreasonable enough to make.

My holidays had been put off, by Mrs. Godfrey's wish, until the Thursday in Easter week. On the following Saturday afternoon we went to our old haunt, the South Kensington Museum. I was not without a hope that Hubert, who always left the City early on Saturday, would choose that place for an instructive stroll, on the chance of finding something pleasanter than instruction there. We were going through the central court, carelessly looking at the "objects of interest" in the glass cases, when, looking up, I saw, a little way off, Mr. Barach. He was watching us. Never under his gaze, nor even under Hubert's, had I felt my whole face burn with such a deep uncomfortable blush as I suffered at that moment. He looked pale and careworn, and the deep mourning he wore for his brother gave him a still more haggard appearance. I felt as if I had done him wrong; and, as he walked up to us, a strange fancy seized me that he was come to demand reparation. I could not avoid him. Our greetings were stiff, except Elsie's, and we fell to common-places. Two fellow-students of Elsie's—girls she knew well—passed by; an unlucky impulse made her go up and speak to them, and Mr. Barach took the opportunity to ask me to let him have a few moments' private conversation. I would have given the world to

escape, but it was impossible; so I asked Elsie to wait five minutes. I wished to stay where we were, in full view of passers-by, whose presence must be a restraint upon my companion; but he led me, keeping up at first an attempt at light talk, to that desolate corner near the ferneries where nothing dwells but ugly curiosities in stone. There I was at his mercy.

"Guinevere, won't you pity me?"

He looked so unlike a man of whose luck and triumph all men were talking that I wondered. Could all this dejection be caused by the death of a brother now dead some three months, for whom, living, he had not seemed to care much? I was touched.

"I am very sorry for your loss," said I gently.

"Which loss?" asked he bitterly.

I was shocked, bewildered. He went on—

"I seem to have lost everything, or rather never to have won anything worth the winning."

"Has not the 'Bouches du Rhône'—— Everybody is talking about it," I began hesitatingly.

"Yes, yes; and that bit of brummagem success ought to satisfy every craving of a man's heart or soul for the rest of his life. I have been told that, or nearly that, already. Guinevere, they sicken me with their compliments on my strength and my courage, when I know that I am weak and a coward."

I began almost to fear that over-work and over-excitement had affected his brain. He saw anxiety in my quick upward glance, and, by an effort, spoke more calmly.

"I am frightening you. Bear with me a few minutes longer; I won't call myself any more names. Think that since I saw you last I have been harassed and wretched, checked when I expected sympathy, chilled when I most wanted encouragement."

I felt that these confidences were dangerous; I feared he was going on to others I had no right to hear; but I had not the heart to break away from the passionate man in his misery.

"Has not a man a right to some sign of feeling and interest in the girl he is going to marry? Is it not hard when the interest is shown in spying upon his actions, and the feeling in outbursts of petty jealousy?"

"Mr. Barach——"

"Listen ; it concerns you ! After my meeting with you in her father's garden, Lady Kate treated me to fits of alternate pique and indifference which perplexed me. I never thought of jealousy as her motive ; I had not told her of your care of me—I suppose I was wrong—and there was nothing in my meeting with you to excite her suspicion. I was trying loyally to forget—every woman but her. It was at a time when I was struggling against difficulties, and when a little warmth and interest on her part, such as she had bestowed upon me once, and which had made me ask her to be my wife, would perhaps have chained me to her for ever. But I was no longer a novelty ; she let me drift away, and I was expecting her dismissal, when the tide of my affairs began to turn, and my lady's favor then, slowly, but surely, came back to me. Do you understand ?"

"You are hard," said I.

"I have been hardly treated. However, in the first flush of success I was ready to take my good fortune as it came, and to be duly grateful for the change in my fair-weather love. But, not long ago, she confessed, during a quarrel, her visit to you at Kensington, and taunted me with my silence concerning you. I answered her in a manner that three months ago would have earned me my dismissal ; but then three months ago I was a younger son and a struggling junior partner. After an instant of surprise and reflection, her ladyship made submission meet, and—we are reconciled. I am lucky now, you see ; everything I touch turns into gold !" he added mockingly.

"I really don't see that you have much to complain of, unless it be a surfeit of success," I said gravely.

He looked searchingly into my eyes.

"I see, I see. I have been deceiving myself," he said slowly, almost brokenly ; then he spoke again, with an unexpected vehemence that startled me. "Guinevere, something in your manner at our last meeting gave me a wild hope that you cared for me a little. Heaven forgive me that I call it a hope ! But Lady Kate had already begun to grow cool ; I was expecting her to jilt me ; my conscience was not free enough to let me take the initiative. Guine-

vere, I have skulked about lately like a thief watching for an opportunity of meeting you. I come to you to-day to beg you, Guinevere, if you have one spark of tenderness for a man who would die for you, to be generous enough to confess it. With that knowledge, I would break my chain and come to your feet—free.”

But all his passion, all his tenderness, caused me nothing but disgust now. I answered him with fire—

“And do you think that I would confess tenderness for a man who is not free? Our notions of loyalty do not agree, Mr. Barach.”

“You are cruel. I did not think you could be so hard.”

“I am not hard. I will tell you frankly that once I did care for you a little; but I knew it was wrong, and I tried to conquer the feeling, and I have succeeded—entirely.”

“You love some one else!” he broke out shortly.

The color rushed to my face. I did not attempt to rebuke him, for I felt, with shame, that, if the accusation had not been true, I could not have been so loftily indignant. As my eyes dropped, he turned silently away. Then the memory of him lying sick and helpless in my mother’s room flashed across me, and woke that tender fear of wounding which always lingers in a woman’s heart towards a man who is indebted to her. I laid my hand gently on his arm.

“Mr. Barach, I am afraid I have spoken harshly; I did not mean to do so, indeed. If I have wounded you, forgive me.”

He turned towards me again, took my hands, and spoke so sadly, so humbly, that pity made me very gentle.

“You are as generous as ever, Guinevere, asking pardon of the man whose fate it seems to be to trouble you. I am not quite selfish, indeed. On my honor, Guinevere, nothing could reconcile me so well to—happiness and Lady Kate as the knowledge that you had a nobler heart than mine to trust in——” His tone was grave and sincere; at these last words the quivering of my hands betrayed me.

He stopped, and then broke out dismayed—

“Good Heaven! But not, not at Hawkstone! You!”

I drew sharply back.

“Mr. Barach, you are going too far.”

But the expression of amazement and anxiety on his face only deepened; there was in it no jealousy; I believe that moment's terror was unselfish. But my heart was in arms for the man I loved; and, without giving him a chance of another word, I bowed, and left him among the stone curiosities, hardly more stiff and still than he in his astonishment.

I soon found Elsie, who, seeing that I was disturbed and excited, and not then inclined to be talkative, kept pace with my quick steps towards the door, and asked no questions. But presently she said—

"Do you know, Guinny, while I was sitting waiting, I think I saw Mr. Hubert Godfrey. At first I thought it was his brother; but, when—when I saw that he took no notice of me, I looked again: and I am almost sure it was Mr. Hubert."

I had stopped involuntarily as she mentioned his name, flushing as I listened.

"How long ago? Which way?" I asked.

"About five minutes before you came; he was walking very fast, this way."

My heart seemed to give a great leap. Had he seen me with Eugene? If so, what must he have thought?

"Did he look—— How did he look? Oh, Elsie!" cried I.

"Guinny, Guinny, don't look like that! I could not see his face; he was not near enough. I am not quite sure that it was he at all, you know."

But it was only too probable. However, as we walked on, I reflected that it was hardly likely that he would have been near that remote corner where Mr. Barach and I had held our conference; that, having missed me, he must have gone out in a hurry, perhaps to call at our lodging; but, when we got there, we found that nobody had come. After I had mastered my first fright, Elsie ventured upon a little arch comparison of my manner when I last heard of Hubert's coming to catch a glimpse of me and my manner now. Her delight at finding her prophecy come true, that I had loved Hubert at last, raised my spirits, and I soon recovered enough to tell her a part, at least, of my talk with Mr. Barach.

The ice once broken, I yielded to the temptation of confidence,

and from day to day, or rather from night to night, indulged her ear with fragments of the scenes and conversations between Hubert and myself; and, whenever I, sometimes with almost a sob, recorded any specially hard-hearted speech of mine, Elsie, who got much excited over these tales and took Hubert's part violently, would hurl a pillow at me in the dark, on the chance of its hitting me.

On the Monday after my arrival in town, I was surprised to receive a rather curt note from Mrs. Fitzgerald, saying that she was going to return to her house in London in a few days, and offering me the post of amanuensis to herself during the rest of my short holiday. I was surprised at the offer, and annoyed by its abrupt style; so I answered immediately by a very short note, saying that I was obliged to her for her offer, which I must however decline, as the time I could spend with my sister was already so short; and I heard no more from her. But I kept her letter, wondering why it had been written; long afterwards I discovered the reason.

Meanwhile, the days passed, and Hubert never came nor wrote, and I fell into anxious watching. At last Elsie caught the infection, and, whatever we were doing, we both would start at a step or a ring, betraying to each other the fact that we were waiting. Not even my darling Elsie could comfort me towards the end of my fortnight's holiday; I longed, and she longed for my sake, that the time were come for me to return to Hawkstone; for we never doubted that something was wrong. After that last look into my eyes as the train moved off, surely he would not have hesitated to write or come to me! More and more firmly my miserable fancy clung to the thought that he had seen me with Eugene; and, if once his jealousy were excited, if once he doubted me, would his newly-developed self-control leave him? Would he get reckless? And then—ah, Heaven, what might not happen then? At last I wrote to him; but I got no answer. When at last, full of remorse for the anxiety which had spoilt Elsie's holidays as well as my own, I left her and started for Hawkstone, my fancy worked, as I sat back in a corner of the railway-carriage, until I felt like one in a fever, and through the "thud, thud" of the wheels I seemed to hear Hubert's voice crying to me.

As the train slowly entered the station, I looked out anxiously, fighting with a vain hope that Hubert's fair, handsome face would be there to welcome me, with the quick flush and shy smile I knew so well; but there was only a man-servant on the platform to meet me. Sick at heart, I got into the brougham that was waiting outside. What the news might be that would greet me on my arrival I knew not; but stronger and stronger grew my certainty that Hubert would not be there; while, with an intensity of longing that I had never known before, I wished to see him, to hear his voice, to take his head into my arms and whisper in his ear that I loved him and prized his constant love higher than anything else in the world.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Godfrey was at home; and, after kissing the children and listening to their prattle with ears that scarcely heard, I ran up-stairs in search of Mrs. French. In doing so, I had but one thought in my mind—what had become of Hubert? Yet when I met her I grew shy, and asked after her own health, and how was Mrs. Godfrey, and Mr. Godfrey, and had they heard from Mr. Tom, and then at last—was Mr. Hubert at home? In spite of my own nervousness, I had noticed that throughout this interview calm Mrs. French had been nervous too. Her composure returned suddenly as I put the last question.

"Mr. Hubert is travelling abroad, ma'am. He started about a week ago."

The news stunned me. I stood before her without the power to speak another word. She went on in her calm, even tone—

"It was a sudden determination on his part; but his father thought it might do him good, and did not thwart him."

• I looked up at her, trying to meet her eyes; but she avoided mine. I had it on my lips to tell her she was lying; but, restraining myself, I asked sharply—

"Did he say anything to you about the reason for his sudden resolution?"

"No, ma'am; I have been away too; I only came back yesterday, and then I found that he was gone."

I could not trust myself to speak again; so I left her, shut myself in my room, and gave myself up to my agony. I had disbelieved Mrs. French entirely at first; I doubted her now; but,

whether true or false, what she had said was enough to fill me with terror. He was gone, I could not tell where; without any given reason. Was he—dead? I asked myself suddenly, shivering. The thought excited me like a spur. I felt that I could not answer for my reason if I stayed any longer there alone. I sprang from the floor, bathed my eyes, and went down-stairs. Rosie and Bernie rushed upon me, having a great deal to tell me of what they had done in my absence.

"And Hubert's gone away, Miss Verney—soon after you did."

"And grandma too, Miss Verney; and she gave me a whip and half-a-crown," said Bernie.

"And Hubert behaved so strangely before he went away, and he was so merry, and he was always laughing," said Rosie. "Only once I saw him crying, and then he caught me up in his arms and told me to comfort him. But he smelt of brandy or something, and I ran away."

Then they prattled on about their pets and a party they had been to, and I smiled and listened and answered, and made a strong effort to enter into their feelings and deaden my own. For to think was to despair. Presently Mrs. Godfrey came in; she too did not seem, to my eyes, to be quite at her ease. The self-restraint I had been exercising stood me in good stead now. I asked after Mr. Godfrey—Tom—Hubert.

"Oh, have you not heard? A little more than a week ago a fresh freak seized him that he would like to travel, and he went off at once. We have not yet heard from him, and I dare say we shall not for some time; he is a wretched correspondent."

She was keeping back something from me, I was sure. I made one effort to make her speak plainly.

"Do you think—do you think, Mrs. Godfrey, that he will keep steady?"

The crimson of her cheek grew deeper, and she answered fretfully—

"I am sure I don't know, Miss Verney. It is impossible to answer for a weak, self-indulgent young man who has been spoilt all his life. You know I always did my best for him, and that he was always ungrateful. But—but I think a change was the best thing

for him. He was getting restless at home." And, after a few words about the children, she left the room.

In my anxiety for Hubert, I had scarcely noticed what they said about Mr. Godfrey; but, when I met him, I thought he looked ill and harassed. He made a slight reference to Hubert's tour, as if he disliked the subject, and, without waiting for comment, turned to something else.

The days and weeks went drearily by after my return. I saw little of either Mr. or Mrs. Godfrey, and spent nearly all my time in the schoolroom. I heard nothing of Hubert; only once Mr. Godfrey lent me a letter from Tom to his father, mentioning Hubert, saying that he thought his going away would do him good. This half reassured me, for I had thought of writing to Tom to find out the truth about his brother's departure, knowing that Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey would not dare to deceive him. After that letter of his, I felt that my suspicions had no reasonable ground, and, though even then I could not conquer them, I began to be ashamed of them. But my anxiety grew strong again as the weeks went on. I could imagine no reason for his sudden resolution to go abroad but jealousy or distrust of me, founded, as I supposed, upon his having seen me with Eugene. His faith I never doubted for an instant; but I had the strongest fears for his self-control. If I had only known where he was, I knew that a letter from me would call him back at once; but no one could or no one would tell me.

Six weeks had passed; I had not seen Mr. Godfrey for several days, when, meeting me one morning, he was struck by my paleness, and told me kindly, with a look that seemed almost remorseful, that I was making myself ill.

"You are growing quite thin and white. We must get Mrs. Godfrey to take you to a ball, and see if the compliments of your numerous admirers won't bring the roses into your cheeks again."

But the tears welled up into my eyes at these words. Nobody's compliments could please me now. He looked still more disturbed.

"My dear child," he began; and then, his voice getting husky, he patted my shoulder and turned away. But the next moment he turned back to me, and said hurriedly, "You must not fret, you know. Hubert is getting on all right now——"

My heart seemed to stand still. I raised my eyes, wide with dread, to his face, without a word or a cry. Mr. Godfrey could not bear it; and, leaving his sentence unended, he walked quickly away. I knew now that Hubert was not travelling abroad; his father's good-natured hesitation and half-hearted assurance that he was well had told me that. I darted across the room, and stopped him as he put his hand upon the door-handle.

"Mr. Godfrey, tell me—where is he?"

"You must not ask me; you can do him no good—he is quite well."

He was looking troubled, but stern; and I dared not ask him anything more.

That night I could bear my misery by myself no longer, and I wrote a long, bitter, heart-broken letter to Elsie, telling her all that I knew and nearly all that I feared. I fell asleep, with the bitter tears of despair upon my cheeks.

CHAPTER XVI.

I WAS surprised, when nearly a week had slipped by, to have received no answering letter from Elsie. On the Sunday after I had written, I was returning alone from afternoon church, when, just outside the park gates, I met Eugene Barach. He seemed startled by the change in my looks. I greeted him very coldly; but he was more at his ease than at our last meeting.

"I hope you will pardon my waylaying you, Miss Verney," he said; "but I have something to say to you, and I did not venture to write."

I bowed, and walked on with him away towards the common.

"Ever since I last saw you, I have been regretting my foolish and vain behavior, not knowing how to make amends. At last I determined to call upon your sister—I had found out where she lived when you were staying there—and beg a good-natured message in her next letter to you. I found her in great distress about a letter from you. At first she would only tell me you were in great

trouble; but, when she saw how miserable this bare information made me, she was kind enough to trust me a little further." I raised my head indignantly. "You do not think I would insult you or her by idle curiosity? She told me enough to give me a hope of being of use to you."

"How?" asked I, still indignant at Elsie's breach of confidence. He did not look at me as he answered.

"She told me you were unhappy because you were unable to obtain any tidings of—a person you were interested in. If this is so, I will make every effort to get the information you wish for, if you will only trust me with the search."

I could see that he was striving to speak more calmly than his feelings prompted. I looked into his face, astonished.

"But do you know of whom it is I want tidings?" I asked involuntarily; and I saw by the look on his face that he did know.

"Whoever it may be, Miss Verney, it is enough for me that to hear from him would give you pleasure. You need not hesitate to accept my services," he went on earnestly. "I owe you a debt of gratitude and reparation for a repeated offence. Be generous, and let me serve you."

After a moment of tearful shame and hesitation, I held out my hand impulsively.

"Thank you. I am very, very grateful to you—I cannot tell you how grateful; but I cannot accept your offer. There are many difficulties in the way which make it impossible——" I paused, and, reluctant as I was to accept his services, the remembrance that this was perhaps my only chance of hearing of or from Hubert made me add, almost in a whisper, "And yet——"

Then, as Eugene caught at the words and pressed me earnestly to trust him, I gave way and burst into passionate tears. With gentle, brotherly words he soothed me, until the trust he had asked for came into my heart; and, with my head hung down and my hands tightly clasped, trying to speak calmly and evenly, I told him what I knew and what I feared. When I confessed my dread that Hubert had been put under supervision as a dipsomaniac, Eugene burst out, shocked—

"And you love this man?"

This challenge brought a spark of the old spirit into my eyes; and I answered passionately—

"I love him with all the heart I have to give, and I should love him if he had lost every trace of the sweetness and generosity that first won me." Eugene said nothing; and, after a few minutes' silence, I broke out again. "You don't understand. You are shocked, disgusted perhaps, that I can care for a man with such a vice hanging over him. Do you think I don't mind the thought that he may have fallen again? Do you think I don't feel degraded myself at the thought? You think he must have been despicable; but he was not—I not only loved him, I respected him. He was weak; but I have seen him constantly exercising the self-control of the strong; and was it for me to despise him because he did so for my sake? I am miserably certain that that self-control would never have left him if he had not been led to doubt my faith."

"But, pardon me, are you so sure of his faith?"

"Yes," said I sadly. "However low he may have sunk, crushed down by the tender hands of his friends, I know he is true to me."

"But, supposing your suspicions well founded, what sufficient motive could Mrs. Godfrey and Mrs. Fitzgerald have for shutting him up?"

"Mrs. Godfrey hates him, through the cruelest prejudice; and she is encouraged in her dislike by her mother, who would use any means to leave Mr. Godfrey's fortune unburdened by provision for his eldest sons. Mrs. Fitzgerald was acquiring such a strong influence over Mr. Godfrey—who has been much weaker of will since his illness—when I went away, that I believe she could have persuaded him into anything she wished."

"But don't you know that no man can be forced into an establishment of this kind without his own free consent?"

"Who knows by what hateful means they may have wrung it from him?" I burst forth, in such misery of conviction that Eugene was silenced.

I told him I had no clue to help him in his search; yet I felt hope rising even as he quietly listened to me. He asked for Mrs. Fitzgerald's address, which I gave him, and then I bade him grate-

fully good-bye, and his face flushed with pleasure as I, holding his hand, looked up tearfully and thanked him.

Awakened from my dull torpor into an agony of alternate hope and despair, feeling almost guilty of treachery towards my employers, I found these days of suspense the hardest to bear of all. On the fourth morning after my interview with Eugene, Mr. Godfrey received at breakfast-time a letter which seemed to affect him powerfully; at once I guessed that it concerned Hubert. He looked at me half furtively as he left the room without speaking, hastily withdrawing his eyes from my white, anxious face. I dared ask no question; but I felt that on that and the two following days an unusual excitement moved both him and Mrs. Godfrey, who avoided me. No one told me anything. I dared not ask; but I waited and watched and listened in a fever of hope and dread.

On the third evening after the arrival of that letter, while Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey were at dinner, I was sitting in the schoolroom by the open window. It was June; but the nights were chilly; I had just risen to shut the window, when the faint sound of wheels and a horse's hoofs at the front of the house made me stop and listen with an agony of intentness that I could not have explained. I seemed to have stood like that for an hour—it must have been two or three minutes—when the door-bell rang. Then, no more doubt, delay, hesitation! In a moment I had darted across the room, opened the door, flown through the great hall, the little hall, through the great front-door, which a footman had just opened, and was standing upon the doorstep with my heart upon my lips. I was not surprised, I was not shocked as I stood there, to see Eugene at the door of a carriage, holding out his arm gently. I knew Hubert was inside; I knew he was ill; I knew that in another moment he would be in my arms. But I was not prepared for the terrible pang which shot through my heart when I first caught sight of his face, white, thin, and haggard, and saw him totter up the steps leaning on Eugene's arm. Did he not see me? Would he pass me? I seemed unable to move. I did not know that, while the hall-lamps shone full upon him, I was in shadow. He was half-way up the steps when I whispered hoarsely, "Hubert!" He looked up—it was with the old radiant smile again; he left Eugene's

support, sprang up the remaining steps, and snatched me into his arms.

I do not know what helpless, broken confession I made as I stood there, with his tears falling fast upon my face and his loving arms round me, though I remember the sound of my voice as it rang in the night air. I know that gentle hands led us in; and then I turned to see Mr. Godfrey, with bowed head and tears on his own face, with one arm in mine, gently patting my shoulder, and to see Mrs. Godfrey shrinking back, pitiful, frightened and guilty! In another minute Hubert had given her the kiss of forgiveness; but, even as he did so, I felt that I hated her for all that she and her heartless, grasping mother had brought upon him. When he had greeted his father, and the latter had begun to thank Eugene, Hubert turned again to me, and it was on my arm that he leaned as he went up-stairs to his room; for no one disputed my right to be by his side. One more kiss he gave me as, blinded by my tears, I left him.

Eugene would not stay, as Mr. Godfrey entreated him to do; but before he went he told me, at my request, how he had found Hubert.

He had first called upon Mrs. Fitzgerald, and told her that he was a friend of Tom's come straight from Paris, commissioned by him to call upon his brother and find out if he were improving in the Retreat. Thus Eugene had boldly taken for granted that my suspicions were true. Then he told her that he had mislaid the address of the Retreat in question, and, knowing Mrs. Fitzgerald to be a connection of the family, had ventured to call upon her as he was passing through town, in the hope that she might be able to give it him. Then he had led the conversation off to his business, and promised her some shares in the "Bouches du Rhône" Company. After that, growing more confidential, he had confided to her his admiration of "the governess at Hawkstone." Catching at this, Mrs. Fitzgerald had told him he had a rival in Hubert, at present safely out of the way. Eugene had agreed heartily that the Retreat was the best place for him, and had gone away triumphantly with the address.

He then started immediately for Doctor Longton's, the Retreat

in question, in Buckinghamshire, where he was received rather suspiciously, though stating that he came by commission of the family of Mr. Hubert Godfrey. Doctor Longton said Mr. Godfrey declined to receive anybody; but Eugene insisted upon seeing him, and was struck by his wan, sunken face and evident weakness. The Doctor hastened to show him, before his leave-taking, a paper, with a scrawling signature in Hubert's hand, stating that he entered Doctor Longton's establishment of his own free will, and undertook to remain there until such time as the Doctor should consider him cured of his intemperate habits. Eugene had not been able to speak alone to Hubert, who seemed to have had all spirit crushed out of him, and had a hopeless look in his eyes that touched Eugene to the quick. The latter had gone back to his hotel in the nearest town, and written to Mr. Godfrey, telling him that his son was seriously ill, and that he feared that he was in bad hands. Mr. Godfrey had replied at once, saying he should be deeply obliged if Mr. Barach, being still in the neighborhood of the Retreat, would effect his son's release, as he had offered to do. Mr. Godfrey had written to Doctor Longton, desiring that he would let his son go off with Mr. Barach.

On returning to the Retreat, it was only under threat of a visit from the police that the Doctor had allowed his "patient" to leave; and, on their journey back, which they were obliged to make in short stages, on account of Hubert's weakness, the latter had given him such an account of his stay as seemed to make Eugene's blood freeze in his veins.

I could not thank Eugene; I could only clasp his hands in mine and try to press them to my lips.

"Don't, Guinevere; I deserve no gratitude. I thank Heaven I have been able to help you at last. Good night," said he.

I went up-stairs, sad for his sake, sad for Hubert's, but with a deep peace and joy at the bottom of my heart at the thought that my love was near me again, mine for ever now. As I slowly passed his door, I was stopped by a sound that tolled away my happiness like a knell. It was only a cough; but, little as I knew of illness, I felt that that cough was a signal of danger; and, with my brow wet with fear, I leaned against the wall by his door. Before I had recovered, Mrs. French came out. She started on seeing me.

"Miss Verney!"

"Oh, Mrs. French!" I whispered back.

But Hubert's quick ears had caught the sound of my voice; and he called out, "Good night, Guinevere."

"Good night, good night," returned I, hardly able to steady my breaking voice; and then, all in tears, I let Mrs. French lead me away to my room. When we reached it, she came in with me, put me into a chair, and began in a tone much less firm than usual—

"Miss Verney, why did you not let me see how much you cared for him, when you came back, instead of putting on that indifferent manner which half deceived me? I should not have had the heart to resist you, if you had let me see how much you cared."

"Did you know all then? You told me you were away when he went!"

"Not quite, though I let you understand me so. I did go away; but it was not until after he had left. But I thought with them all that it was best for you not to know where he had gone."

"Oh, how could you all be so cruel, so hatefully cruel?" I burst out, moaning.

She paused, full of pity and remorse.

"Indeed, my dear Miss Verney, I did think it cruel when I saw you; and, if you had only given way when you asked about him, I must have told you everything."

"And so you left it to chance whether he should be murdered in that fearful place or come home to die before my eyes!"

"Don't, my dear Miss Verney; you are over-excited, and cannot see things calmly. Mr. Hubert is ill—and no wonder, after all he has gone through, poor young man—but he will soon get well now he is among his friends again."

"Friends!" I echoed bitterly.

"And with you to nurse him," added Mrs. French.

Yes, I might nurse him; there was comfort in that; and I grew calmer, and begged her to tell me what had happened between my departure and his.

She said that, on the day I left and the following, Hubert had seemed very light-hearted and happy. But on the next, which was Saturday—the day I met Mr. Barach in the Museum—he had come

home late, gloomy and irritable, and had sat up drinking with some gentlemen staying in the house. The next day he came down very late. Mrs. Fitzgerald met him, and Mrs. French had heard his voice in loud and violent discussion with her. After that, he had been scarcely sober for the rest of the day, and at night he drank harder than ever.

"That wretched woman!" cried I, starting up in frenzy. "What had she been saying to him?"

"I don't know indeed, ma'am; but—"

"She never checked him! She encouraged him! She is a demon!"

"Hush, hush, Miss Verney! I cannot go on if you talk like that."

"Go on, go on. I won't cut you short again. You must tell me."

"Next day he stayed at home, by——" she hesitated.

"By what, Mrs. French?" asked I, on fire.

"Do keep calm, ma'am, and I will tell you everything. He stayed at home, by Mrs. Fitzgerald's advice."

I slipped on to the floor, and fastened my hands tightly round Mrs. French's arm, trying to keep quiet.

"Go on."

"But he went on just the same; and— Oh, Miss Verney, I must say it—I believe you are right; she did encourage him! At least, he was always worse after talking to her."

I dared not speak then, for I could not have controlled the bitter hatred that welled up in my heart. Mrs. French continued—

"I pitied the poor young fellow with all my heart, for he seemed to be abandoned by every one except Mrs. Fitzgerald, and I could not help suspecting her. Mrs. Godfrey avoided him. His father, after a few words of remonstrance which his son hardly listened to, left him to himself, with a shrug of his shoulders. He seemed half afraid of looking on what was partly, you know, his own doing. I made up my mind to speak to him myself; and on the Tuesday, as I passed through the great hall, where he was sitting, with brandy, as usual, on a table beside him, I went up to him and said, 'Mr. Hubert, you must forgive my interference; but you are

doing yourself harm by staying so much indoors. Why don't you go out for a ride?' "

" 'I like staying indoors better, Mrs. French, thank you,' said he, looking up at me sleepily.

" 'I would not give up; so I said, 'Oh, Mr. Hubert, what would Miss Guinevere say if she could see you now?' You see, ma'am, I could not help knowing that your influence was stronger than any one else's over him. He looked up with a black frown that frightened me.

" 'She doesn't care what becomes of me any more than the rest of 'em do. She's got a nice, new, sober lover now. My turn's over! ' "

I was listening to Mrs. French half paralysed. She went on—

" 'I was so shocked, ma'am, I could scarcely speak at first. Then I said, 'You ought to know Miss Guinevere better than to doubt her like that. Even if——'

" 'Doubt her!' he cried out fiercely. 'Do you think I'd doubt her without reason, without proof? But I have proof. On the very day she left I wrote to her, asking if I might go and see her; and she never answered. I waited till Saturday, and then I went to see her, and I did see her. Oh, great Heaven!'

" 'Miss Verney, the despair in his face and voice brought the tears to my eyes. If he had not been so excited, I'm sure he would not have told me so much; for he went on—

" 'I saw her with her other lover, Mrs. French, hanging on his arm, just two days after she had sent me almost off my head with happiness by looking into my eyes as if— Oh, I shall go mad! Get me some more brandy!'

" 'No, no,' said I, trying to soothe him, 'not just yet. I am sure you are mistaken, sir; it was some old friend of hers, I am sure.'

" 'Yes, it was,' he said, with an oath; 'a friend she—' He stopped short, and I broke in again—

" 'But, sir, pray listen to reason.'

" 'Oh, I can give you reason enough to listen to, Mrs. French! Next day Mrs. Fitzgerald told me she was engaged to him.'

" 'But, sir,' said I, 'excuse me; but how did Mrs. Fitzgerald find it out?'

"'How the deuce should I know?' Those were his own words, ma'am; and he went on—'I wouldn't believe her at first, and wanted to rush off then and there to Guinevere. But Mrs. Fitzgerald reminded me that she would not be very likely to answer me in the state I was in; and she offered to write herself to Guinevere. I caught at the offer, and she wrote a letter before my eyes, saying she was sorry to interrupt the enjoyment of Miss Verney's holidays; but, knowing her kindness, she ventured to ask if Miss Verney would come down and spend a couple of days merely as a visitor at Hawkstone, as one member of the family was in sore need of her advice and influence. I scrawled a "P.S." myself,' he went on, 'begging her to come, if only for a day, or to let me go to her, and—and——'

"Here I interrupted him, ma'am. 'Mrs. Fitzgerald never posted it.'

"'Yes, she did,' he broke out, fiercely; 'and this morning she got the answer. Here it is.' And he threw it over to me. Oh, Miss Verney, I read it, and I could scarcely believe——"

I had listened to Mrs. French in bewilderment; then the truth broke upon me and I started up, with a shriek.

"Oh, Mrs. French, let me go! I must go to him and tell him. I never got the letter."

"But you answered?"

"Not that letter; she never sent it; but—— Oh, I must go to him!"

But she held me.

"Miss Verney, consider. He is in bed, and very likely asleep by this time. You must wait till the morning."

I had forgotten that. I sank down by my bedside, sobbing miserably.

"She wrote me a curt note asking me to spend my holidays with her in town as her amanuensis. I at once wrote a refusal; and she must have shown it to him as the answer to the letter she never sent."

Mrs. French's pity soothed me a little, and then she told me the rest.

He had got worse and worse after that day. Two or three

gentlemen came to see him, brought, Mrs. French thought, by Mrs. Fitzgerald, to prove that he was incapable of controlling his own actions. On the following Saturday he had gone off in a carriage, apparently without making any opposition.

"Indeed, Miss Verney, I am afraid he was not in a state to oppose anything;" and Mrs. French was told he had consented to go to an establishment where he would be put under treatment for his cure. "Mr. Godfrey seemed unhappy about him, but glad to be rid of the sight of him, ma'am. He felt his presence in that state a reproach to himself, I believe. He said to me that I was to tell you Mr. Hubert was travelling, as he was afraid the truth would shock you. You see, ma'am, he knew nothing about the despair that had had such a terrible effect upon his son. I believe he thought it was the natural reaction from the restraint Mr. Hubert had put upon himself for the last few months, since you have been here, ma'am."

Long after Mrs. French left me, I lay tossing in a fever of despair and impatience. After that, I slept a deep sleep of exhaustion until morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next morning it was hard to keep my attention with my pupils while my ears were on the alert for Hubert's footstep coming down-stairs, and doubly hard when I had heard him pause outside the schoolroom door and then go on to the morning-room. But soon after a maid appeared with a message from Mrs. Godfrey, saying that the nurse would take care of the children, and that she and Mr. Hubert would be glad to see me in the morning-room. With my heart beating fast, I crossed the great hall. Mrs. Godfrey was painfully nervous, and kept up a stream of rapid talk as she greeted me. Hubert was shy this morning, and so was I; the blood rose in his thin white cheeks when he looked at me, and I felt my hand tremble as I shook hands with him. After a few minutes, Mrs. Godfrey made her escape, asking me if I would entertain

Hubert, as the invalid must not be left alone, and she could not stay. I guessed this to be an arrangement of Mr. Godfrey's, as she was not likely to be pleased that Hubert and I should exchange confidences about the events of the past ten weeks. When she had left us, I tried to keep up trifling talk for a few minutes; but, when I paused, he broke in—

"Guinevere, why wouldn't you come when Mrs. Fitzgerald wrote?"

With trembling fingers I took from my pocket the letter I had received from her.

"She never sent the letter she showed you, with your post-script. Mrs. French told me about it. This is what I got from her."

He took it and read it through. Then he started up as if he had been struck, and taking from his pocket-book the fragments of my answer to Mrs. Fitzgerald, he placed them with shaking fingers upon the table beside me.

"And this letter——"

"I wrote in answer to the one I have just shown you. Oh, Hubert, how could you believe for one moment that I would have stayed away after such an appeal?"

But he still stood bewildered.

"Then my first letter that I wrote directly after I had seen you off at the station——"

"I never got it. I was miserable at not hearing from you; I don't know how I lived through that wretched fortnight, expecting, waiting, and always disappointed."

"Then she stopped my letter!" cried Hubert, suddenly. "I left it in the hall-box to be posted, and she must have guessed I would write, or seen me put it in, and she never let it go!"

He stood beside me for a minute, as if lost in a maze of thoughts; then he threw himself upon the sofa and buried his face in his hands.

"Why, that woman has hunted me down like a fiend! What did she want to ruin me for?" said he, in a low hoarse voice, looking up at me at last.

"Because she wanted to work round your father as she liked,

and to get as much out of him as she could. Tom was already out of the way ; so she never rested until she had got rid of you—and fair means or foul were all alike to her ! Oh, Hubert, she is a fiend ! ”

“ Before Heaven, I believe it, Guinevere ! ” said he, staring at me with feverishly glittering eyes. “ That Saturday, after you left, I saw you at the Museum with Barach—I was in a fever to meet you because you had not answered my letter. And you were hanging on his arm, Guinny ; and how could I know ? He has told me all since ; but I knew nothing then—and I had felt so sure you cared for me after that look as you went away—and the blow sent me half mad. I thought I had been a fool to think you cared for me, and I felt I hated you. And that she-devil, Mrs. Fitzgerald, when she saw the humor I was in, she seemed to say things that goaded me on in my madness, and—and—and I gave way, Guinny—I dare say they’ve told you—and you know—you can guess——” His head sank down in shame, and so did mine ; he could not see my arms held out to him. “ It was worse after your answer came ; I didn’t care a rush what became of me. I know I was a weak fool ; but you know, Guinny, I never was strong till you taught me how ; and, when I thought you had thrown me over, I—I let myself go—and I did go, fast enough, Heaven knows ! Then they got me to sign a paper asking for admission into Doctor Longton’s ‘ Retreat ’—I didn’t care what I did, and I wasn’t sober when I signed it ; and she took care to get the necessary witnesses to the fact that I was an ‘ habitual drunkard. ’ ”

“ Oh, don’t, Hubert ! ” I moaned bitterly.

He looked up, and my loving tearful eyes met his. In a moment he was kneeling at my feet, looking up into my face with the old sweet smile I knew so well.

“ I have a lot more to confess to you, Guinny ; but I’ll tell it you—so, now, if you’ll let me. ” And he put his head upon my lap.

I let my clasped hands fall softly on his neck, where they quivered as he went on—

“ I can’t tell you what an *inferno* that place was. That Doctor Longton is no more human than she. It was his interest to keep his patients, especially me—Mrs. Fitzgerald had no doubt made it

worth his while—and I felt that I was, in truth, condemned, with no mercy to hope for. His treatment was torture. It was a system you must have heard of—to kill the taste by excess. Everything I ate or drank or touched was seasoned with brandy—no escape from the taste or the smell—till I grew sick with every mouthful, refused to eat, and lived in never-satisfied hunger and thirst. I implored him to change the course, told him he must be content, that I was cured, that the taste now filled me with loathing, begged him to try me with temptation, to leave the hateful drink in my way all through the night, through the day, for a week. He did so; it was a temptation no longer; but he would not let me go. I was shut in by bars and bolts, not formidable looking, but strong and safe; I was watched and warded.

“All the while no letter ever came from any one to me. The letters I wrote were not sent, I am sure—I wrote to you, to my father, to Tom, with never an answer. I knew they had not been sent; for, worse than all, my doubts of you had grown weak in the wretched hours of my imprisonment, and I longed to escape from the degrading bondage I was in, and recover my self-esteem for your sake—even if you did love Barach. I wondered, in my degradation, how I could ever have had the wretched self-conceit to think you could care for a worthless fellow like me.”

My hands closed more tightly as he said this, and I stooped and kissed his forehead. He looked up at me, stammering passionate words of love and gratitude; then he broke down, and sobbed as he knelt. I soothed him with all the tender, caressing words my love could suggest, while he struggled to regain his self-command.

“Heaven bless you, Guinevere! I have nothing left but the shape of a man; and yet you pour your love out to me now as if I were a hero.”

“You are my hero,” I whispered; and, after a long pause, while he drew my hands into his and held them with a loving pressure, he went on—

“Twice I attempted to escape. The first time I tried to overpower a warder, a fellow whom I could have floored with one hand once. But I had grown so weak that he held me easily until some one else came to help him. Guinny, that was awfully hard to bear;

the only thing I ever had to boast of was my muscle, and to find that I had lost my strength seemed to finish me. I used to pride myself upon having at least a pair of strong arms to protect you, and now—”

“And now I should feel safer in your arms than anywhere else in the world,” I whispered. “Go on, go on, my darling, and remember it is all over now.”

After a little while he continued—

“The second attempt I made to escape was about three weeks ago. By that time I had settled down into a stubborn, sullen despondency, seeing nothing before me but slow starvation. I thought of you day and night; I began to feel that I had been deceived in some way, and to feel sure that, though you might not love me, you would never abandon me without a thought. I was haunted during the long wretched nights by the idea that you were waiting outside the gates for me, and that they would not let you in. It was simply childish, but already I was a wreck in body and mind.

“I broke out one day, and roughly demanded that the brutal treatment I was under should be changed. To my surprise, the doctor promised that it should. That very day, instead of the cursed brandy, they put before me Madeira. I drank it greedily; of course, in the feeble state I was in, it got into my head; yet, at the next meal, though all the food had the hated taste I loathed, the drink was again Madeira. Guinny, I had the sense to see that this was the vilest of traps; it was not put there to try my strength, but to tempt my weakness. Yet I am ashamed to say how I longed for it. Remember what a relief the change was; that I was weak for want of food, burning with thirst; remember that I thought myself abandoned by every one whose respect I cared for; and remember too, Guinny, the terrible craving that was born with me. It seemed to wake again in me then with a violence I had never known before. I conquered it that time, Guinny; I didn't even dash down the decanter as I used to do with the brandy at first; but I left it untasted. I must tell you that I used to get a little water through one of the warders, or I could not have lived; for that in the water-jug and bottle was all dashed with brandy.

“That night the wine was by my very bedside—I threw it

away, for I dared not trust myself. As I lay awake, excited and feverish, I could bear it no longer; some spark of spirit had come back to me now that this last outrage had shown me plainly that what they called my 'cure' was simply my ruin. I started from the bed, half dressed myself, opened one of the two windows, and tried to force the iron bars in front of it. I could not. I tried those before the other windows. I told you I was weak; but my fierceness seemed to give me back some of my old strength. At last one of the bars gave way on one side. I forced myself through and let myself drop. It was too dark to see. I struck my head violently against a melon-frame as I came to the ground, and fell insensible. When I came to myself, I was weak, giddy, and stiff with cold. I groped my way to the outer garden wall—of course the iron gates were locked. The wall was high; but, with the help of a fruit-tree nailed against it, I climbed to the top; growing giddy again, however, I fell from it—again insensible. At day-break I was found lying outside by a passing laborer, who, in cruel compassion, rang the gate-bell, and saw me taken in once more to my prison.

"But, after that, either alarm or compunction made them treat me better. I was half dead from weakness, cold, and the injuries I had received in my two falls; and, while I was ill in bed, I was properly fed again, and tormented no more. Even when I got up, I was so weak and my cough was so bad that I suppose they thought they might trust to my dying quietly without the trouble of getting rid of me, for they left me alone still. Doctor Longton said he would write to my father as soon as I was 'fit to be moved'—Heaven knows what he meant by that, Guinny, unless he meant as soon as my coffin was ready. He added that, although he could not yet answer for my being completely cured, yet my desperate attempt at escape had much grieved him, as he had always endeavored to treat his patients with as much consideration as was compatible with such a necessarily severe course of treatment. I did not believe him, Guinny, and I had made up my mind to disappear quietly off the face of the earth, with that scoundrel's 'tender cares to soothe my last moments,' when Eugene Barach called. In my abject wretchedness I was foolish enough to look upon him as

the cause of all I had suffered, and to imagine that he had come to see how soon his miserable rival would be out of the way. I flung the taunt in his face, and—Guinny, forgive me—I struck him. He bore with me nobly, yet without any ostentation of pity; and, when he was gone, I was forced to own to myself how much worthier of you he was than I had ever been or could be. He came again, and got me out, as you know; and, when I had asked his pardon and acknowledged my wretched jealousy, and tried to congratulate him upon having won you, he told me that I was mistaken—that you had owned your love to me. Oh, Guinevere, it was almost too much for me! Then he explained that meeting in the Museum, and ended by saying that you—you, my lovely, loving, true-hearted darling—were pining away for me. I could scarcely believe him.”

He raised his eyes and looked long into mine, and, as he looked, his last doubt melted away.

Hubert recovered so quickly from the terrible depression into which he had been crushed down that, in my joy at hearing his old light-hearted laugh and impetuous speeches, I almost overlooked the fact that his strength did not come back too. But my blindness did not last long. Most of his time he passed on the sofa; even the light fatigue of a drive soon proved too much for him—and then that terrible cough!

I was with him constantly. Mr. Godfrey had told me, with tears in his eyes, that my duties in the schoolroom were at an end, that I must stay at Hawkstone now, no longer as governess, but as a daughter. He never would acknowledge that his son's weakness was more than a temporary consequence of what he had suffered in the Retreat; and one day, when he was sitting with Hubert and me, he asked jocularly when the wedding was to be.

Hubert blushed as deeply as I did, and said, with a twitching face, that he must wait until he could walk to church.

“Besides, father, I haven't even got the lady's consent yet.”

His father, rather disturbed by the meaning he could not help seeing in his son's answer, looked at me.

“You won't be very hard-hearted, will you, Miss Ver—no, Guinevere?”

The tears were running down my cheeks.

"No, Mr. Godfrey."

He turned his eyes hastily from my tearful face, and continued—

"Of course you will be strong again in a month or two, my boy. Still I think you will have to give up the hunting this year, at least for the first part of the season, and go away and nurse yourself in some warm corner—at Cannes, for instance. And, if you cannot get this cruel little lady to go with you—"

"Oh, Mr. Godfrey!" I faltered.

"Well, well, I dare say you will relent," he muttered; and, with a hasty excuse, he left the room.

I was drying my eyes as quickly as I could, when Hubert left his sofa and came to me.

"Don't cry, darling. He is only trying to deceive himself, you know; he sha'n't tease you again. I'll tell him you have promised to see me as far as possible on—my journey," said he, with grave playfulness.

"Oh, Hubert, I won't be left behind!" I burst out, clinging to him. "Do you think I could live without you—that I can go groping on in this dreary, dreary world all alone?" I sobbed, my firmness and self-possession utterly gone.

He waited a minute before he answered, not very firmly—

"No, Guinny; I believe I should wish you to die too if I thought you would be left all alone. But I think there will be some one left to protect and care for—my darling."

I started away from him, and cried bitterly—

"Then you are quite ready to yield me up?"

"I wish to Heaven I could say 'Yes,' Guinevere!" said he passionately. "Do you think it is easy for me to give up all the hopes and joys that I have lived on almost ever since I have known you, even although they are quickly passing out of my reach—yes, quicker and quicker every day? But I should be a wretch not to try to conquer my vain longings, and, please Heaven, I will." Then his tone grew soft as he looked at my bent head and heaving frame. "I believe you think me cruel, my darling—me, your old soft-hearted Hubert. But it was you who taught me to be a man, with all the

tenderness of a sister, and I want you not to be ashamed of—your brother.”

I hung my head still lower; but he raised it and gently kissed my forehead, and soothed me into the semblance of resignation. After that day something like reverence mingled with my love for him.

Soon after his return he wrote to Tom, who came back direct from Paris in answer. Tom's self-reproach, when he saw his brother, was painful to see. When his father had written to say that Hubert had taken to his old habits with tenfold violence, he had honestly thought that to place him under supervision would be the best thing for him for a time; but now, after hearing the account of his brother's treatment, Tom's instant cry was for proceedings against Doctor Longton. He consulted a lawyer the very next day; but the doctor had been so careful and cunning that no proof of cruelty or unlawful detention could be brought against him. However, Tom disappeared one morning, and did not turn up until the evening of the following day, when he sauntered into the drawing-room with a broken hunting-whip in his hand. He took no notice of the inquiries as to where he had been, until Mrs. Godfrey asked what the whip was for.

“It's for nothing now,” he answered, “unless any one would like it as a *souvenir* of a neat thing in scoundrels.”

Hubert started up and clapped his brother on the back with now unusual energy.

“Thanks, Tom. I'd have given worlds to have done it myself—but that's the next best thing.”

“What is the matter? What have you done?” cried Mrs. Godfrey, alarmed.

“I have been paying a visit to Doctor Longton,” said Tom calmly. “And, as I was told the law couldn't touch him, I took with me something that could.”

“Thrashed him? Well done, Tom!” cried his father. “I'd have done it myself, if I hadn't felt that I couldn't bear to go near the place.”

“But won't he have you up for assault?”

“No hope of that, Mrs. Godfrey. If he were to, I'd show him

up as no blackguard—I beg your pardon, I should say miscreant—ever got shown up before. He knows better. But I haven't done with him yet."

And not many months afterwards Tom told me with a chuckle that Doctor Longton had disappeared from Buckinghamshire, and that he was afraid he had forgotten to leave his address.

Meanwhile the great shadow that hung over those peaceful weeks, when Hawkstone seemed a purer place than it had ever been before, grew blacker and blacker. Mr. Godfrey spoke no more of weddings; he knew now well enough what the next solemnity would be in which Hubert would bear a silent part. I knew what was coming; yet, when, after having given up going down-stairs and taken to a sitting-room next his bed-room, the morning came when they told me he was too weak to leave his bed, I fainted away. All day long now I sat by his bedside, and far into the night. They had to drag me away to rest sometimes. At last—I don't know how long it lasted—I lost count of the days, and I don't remember what they told me—we had to watch by him at night. They would not let me watch there always—he said I must have rest. Rest! I had no rest except in the chair by his bedside; but, when I might not watch, I lay tossing on a couch in the next room. At last he grew so weak that he could scarcely do more than smile at me and whisper, and every cough shot through my heart and made me quiver, lest the exertion should have exhausted the feeble life in him.

One day I was alone with him, watching with wistful greedy eyes the wasted face lying on the pillow; I thought he was asleep, and when he slept my eyes scarcely left his face. I was haunted by a feverish thought that if I turned my eyes away, even for a moment, some spell which hung over his life would be broken, and I should look again to find him—gone. At last his eyelids quivered, and in the still room I heard an awful warning sound that made me tremble. No time to summon the others. I put my arm round him and raised his head, while he struggled for breath.

"Lift me higher, higher; hold me in your arms, Guinny," he whispered faintly.

I did so, knowing, with agony that I could scarcely restrain, that it

was for the last time. After a minute, he seemed to recover a little strength, and looked up into my eyes with a loving trustful happiness that transfigured him. I had not thought of Heaven—poor miserable wretch that I was—I had thought of nothing but losing him. But, as he looked at me then, my poor, weak, loving, mortal Hubert, my thoughts went up awe-struck to Heaven and the angels.

"I have never deserved this, Guinny—to die—in your arms! Thank Heaven!"

His head fell forward. I stood quite still, supporting him, waiting. But he never moved. Surely he was not—dead! No, it could not be, for I felt him trembling in my arms; and yet, and yet—was it my own arms only that were trembling? I felt for the first time that the weight I was supporting was almost too much for my strength. Blind for a moment with the mist in my eyes, I pressed my lips to his, but they never moved. Then I looked into his eyes, and knew that the light had gone out of them for ever, that, gaze as I might, call, kiss as I would, I could not kiss back life into the white face that I held to my throbbing heart—nothing but unresponsive clay. As I looked, I seemed to myself to be growing stiff and dead too, till his arm fell heavily down from my shoulder; and then I laughed and shrieked and shuddered, and laid him down, and then——

They found me on the floor beside his bed, writhing and moaning—I had lost my senses. I remember something of the nightmare I lived in after that—that I was pursued by voices and by two hideous faces, one Mrs. Fitzgerald's, the other I knew to be that of Doctor Longton, whom I had never seen. And I became pursuer in my turn, and fled shrieking through all sorts of rough and rugged places, until I had hunted them down and crushed them and mangled them with savage feet and fingers. Only sometimes Hubert's face, just as I had seen it in his last look at me, would shine out upon me and stop me; and then it would fade away, and I would be hunter or hunted once more.

When I came to myself again, Hubert was under the ground. Worse than all the rest was that dreary re-awakening to the world. They were all very, very kind. When I asked if I had been ill, Mrs. Godfrey stammered and hesitated; then I knew that I had

been out of my mind, and I grew shy and afraid of myself, and would steal off to the cemetery on the common where my darling was buried, and remain there until they sent to fetch me home. For Mr. Godfrey told me gently—he was kinder to me than my own father had ever been—that Hawkstone was my home now, and I was to do just what I liked. I did not know, as I tried to thank him, whether it was most sweet or bitter to me to be in the house where Hubert's face seemed to start out of every corner, and Hubert's footfall to sound on every stair. My mind had not quite recovered yet, I suppose; for, as I sat by Hubert's grave, I could not realise that it was not he, actually he, living, breathing, as I had known him, who was down there buried under my feet, out of my reach. It seemed that, if I could only scrape and dig and gnaw away the earth at the foot of the horrible stone that said "Sacred to the Memory"—the memory only?—"of Hubert Godfrey," I should find him, and not a thing I should shudder to look upon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE evening Mr. Godfrey—I liked him better than any one at Hawkstone now, even than Tom—told me that I must have a change; that they were going to take me away with them to Switzerland, and Elsie was to be asked to come too—I might have her down to Hawkstone as soon as I liked now.

He did not know what a pang the thought of tearing myself from all that remained of Hubert and reminded me of him gave me. That evening I asked Tom—I don't know why I chose Tom for the question—why Elsie had not been to see me.

"Because we would not let her come," said he. "We told her what a shock poor Hubert's death had given you, and that the doctor thought it best for you to be quite quiet for a short time; but she has been half distracted about you."

"Then during that time, when I was—ill, didn't I see anybody? I seem to have seen so many people."

"Yes, we all saw you—my father the oftenest."

"Tell me—nobody but you will speak out—was I violent? Did I shriek and cry? I had such terrible dreams."

"Why, yes; you used to get very much excited; and, when you were so, it was curious that my father was the only person that could calm you. Sometimes you used to take him for—Hubert."

"And, tell me, I suppose I never really saw that hateful Doctor Longton or Mrs. Fitzgerald?"

Tom's face changed.

"Did you think you saw them?"

"Yes," said I, curiously adding, "Did I?" as I saw a sudden expression of gratified malice on Tom's face.

"Why, yes, one of them! That harpy had the brass to come down to condole with us. My father would not see her; even Leila was shy with her—for madame has shown a little feeling at last. Mrs. Fitzgerald insisted upon seeing you; but—— Shall I tell you? Perhaps you won't like to hear it?"

"Yes, yes."

"When she came into the room where you were, you flew at her like a little fiend, and accused her of killing Hubert in words that stung even her. After that, she slunk out of the house as if convicted at last; and she has since gone abroad. Do you know I was never more delighted to hear of anything than that little outbreak of yours? She could ward off my sarcasms, but there was no parrying that. So now you and I have paid off at least part of the reckoning against those two demons. Do you know that she almost got my father to cut Hubert quite out of his will when he was sent to the Retreat? And she would have done the same for me as soon as she got a chance. But I don't think she will meddle with any of us again," snarled Tom.

But I was shocked by what he had told me, and he turned the conversation.

"Would you like Elsie to come to you now?"

"No, no, not yet; I should only make her miserable," said I.

We said no more about it; but I felt, from something in his look, how selfish my grief was, and for one day I forced myself not to go to the churchyard.

But, in the weak state of my mind, I could not bear it; and the

next day I was again by my darling's grave. Towards evening, as I sat there, quite still and hopeless, I heard a footstep in the churchyard. I had not curiosity enough to turn my head to see who had entered. At last a man stood by my side. I rose slowly and looked at him. It was Eugene Barach.

"Why have you come?" I asked almost unconsciously.

He did not answer at once. He was looking at me so tenderly, so pitifully, that I was moved out of my apathy, but only into anger that any man but my lost Hubert should dare to look at me so.

"Have you come to torment me again now?"

"No," said he gently. "I came to try to comfort you; and I will leave you this moment, if you please. Remember, your grief is truly mine. I would have given the world to save him."

This was true. I remembered what he had done; and in misery and shame I leaned against the headstone and burst into weak tears.

"Yes, yes; and you did save him—for a little while. Indeed I am not ungrateful to you," I sobbed, letting my handkerchief fall.

He picked it up. I was quivering all over from weakness, and he supported me and tried to dry my eyes. But the action was the very same as that of Hubert on that winter afternoon on the common; and I shrank away from his touch.

"Don't—oh, don't! He did that, and you have no right to comfort me. You are not loyal," I burst out, wounded, and in my selfish anger trying to wound back.

"I am free now," said he gently. "I did not mean to hurt you. Only I know you are doing yourself harm and wasting away under your sorrow, and for your own sake and—his sake I want you to be brave, and to face the world again, hard though it is, I know. And—and," he went on, his voice giving way a little, "I want you to remember that there are—perhaps not very many, but just a few people in the world who are ready to do all they can to shield you and care for you; and, if the world cannot be a happy place to you any longer, at least they would smooth the rough path for you as much as possible."

He stopped. I was touched at last. I said mournfully—

"You are very, very good to me, and I am very hard and selfish; but I will try to thank you when I get better. I am not quite well

yet, I think. My head is weak, and I don't quite know always what I am saying. And you are quite right; I ought to try to rouse myself—and not to think. And now they are going to take me away. Oh, don't let them take me away!" I suddenly ended, springing towards him. I was overwrought, and my head was going round again.

He caught me, and supported me until I had recovered enough to walk back to Hawkstone, leaning on his arm. He stayed to dinner there, but did not obtrude upon me, and scarcely spoke to me again except to bid me good-bye.

Soon after this Elsie came, and the sight of my darling sister comforted me a little. She could not come with me to Switzerland, having to go to the seaside with her pupils; but Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey were so kind that I felt almost as if I had indeed been their daughter.

We were away from England four months, Tom accompanying us as far as Paris, where he settled down to his business again. I had one source of quiet happiness in the new harmony between Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey. The real feeling and sympathy the latter had shown at the illness and death of his son had endeared her to her husband, whom the shock seemed to have made suddenly old.

As for me, I loved them both, for Hubert's sake and for my own, and I think my affection was a link between them. If it had not been for the presence of these loving friends, I think I should have gone mad among those awful Swiss mountains, the sight of which increased tenfold the sense of desolation in my heart.

For the first time since Hubert's death, I had a feeling of gladness when we got back to Hawkstone once more. I could not leave the house until the afternoon of the next day; then I stole out in the chilly November gloom, and made my way to Hubert's grave. The summer flowers on it were dead now: it was choked up with the decaying leaves that the wind had swept into heaps among the gravestones; it looked abandoned, neglected—so soon. I knelt down beside it, and my tears fell quietly upon the damp leaves as I cleared them away, and upon the Christmas rose that I had brought with me to plant there.

I did not feel now as I had felt four months before. I knew now

that it was not Hubert, not my own Hubert, that lay there; but the knowledge made my loneliness more complete. Not there, certainly not there; then where was he? I did not know.

When the dark was drawing in and the dusk creeping over the churchyard, I kissed the stone once more, and left it. In the porch I met Eugene. I had not seen him since our return.

"I knew you would be here to-day," said he.

I was silent; a horrible feeling was creeping over me that I could not escape from this man, that I was surely becoming his prey.

"You are trembling with cold," said he; and, before I could resist, he had placed round my shoulders my own fur mantle, which he was carrying. "I called at Hawkstone before coming here. They told me you had gone to plant something on the grave."

My tears began to fall again.

"Yes, yes, and to sweep the leaves away—it was all choked up. But the dead must be hidden away and forgotten, and '*Place aux vivants!*'" said I bitterly.

"It seems hard. But remember, Guinevere, the dead suffer no longer, while the living——" He paused, looking down at me sorrowfully.

"The living can take care of themselves," said I.

"Yet is it not better to be taken care of, Guinevere?" he asked softly.

"You think I must marry you now," I broke out bitterly, stopping, and looking up at him.

"No; but I know that life will have no value for me if you do not," said he earnestly, but gently.

"You are deceiving yourself. What love do you think I have left to give you? Do you think, if you were to put a wedding-ring upon my finger, it would act like a spell to make me forget Hubert and bow down to you with the respectful worship a husband expects?"

"I don't indeed. Listen! I know that you gave your whole heart's love, such a love as no woman can give twice, to Hubert Godfrey. I know that now you care for nothing but his memory. Yet, knowing all this, I ask you to trust yourself to me. I would

put no irksome restraint upon you; I would make you freer than you are now—thankful for just so much of the love and duty of a wife as you could grant me.”

I listened, ashamed of my own selfishness. He continued—

“If you think I have come too soon, remember that I am offending your ears with no lover’s speeches.” I shuddered. “I only offer the care and kindness of one whom you know, and in whom you can trust just a little, to comfort you and win you gradually back to life again. Will you let me?”

I made an effort to gather my thoughts together, and stood for some minutes thinking.

“I have been very selfish, very ungrateful. But I must tell you the truth. The thought of marriage is hateful to me; but, if you indeed believe the wreck of my life to be necessary to your happiness, you may have it if you will. Wait; I have not forgotten that it was you who gave my—Hubert back to me. But I am afraid you cherish hopes of winning more from me than I can ever give now; so I beg you to pause and consider what I have just said. If you decide to risk it, and take me, why—you may have me. But not now”—as he took my hand. “Tell me some other time; not now, I pray you—I cannot bear it. Let me walk on alone. Good-bye.” And I hurried away from him, almost hating him for his readiness to accept my grudging concession.

At the beginning of the New Year he came, still in the same mind, and kissed the hand I let him take, and we were engaged. The engagement was to last for an indefinite period—I had insisted upon that; whereupon I sank into indifference. A few days afterwards I went to see Elsie. As I travelled up, I reproached myself for my promise to Eugene, picturing to myself the poor child’s disappointment that we were not to pass the rest of our lives together, after all; and my remorse made me half reluctant for the meeting. But she was not at home. I went straight on to the South Kensington Museum and into the Art Library, where she spent much of her spare time. There was something going on in the Museum, and the library was almost deserted. However, I fancied I heard sounds from the other end of the room, and I walked in. Upon the end table was a huge book, placed nearly upright, and some one was

behind it. I walked up softly and looked round the book. There sat Elsie, and close to her, with his arm on the back of her chair and his face almost touching hers, was Tom! I gave a little cry of astonishment, and they both looked up, Elsie red and confused, Tom cool and amused. He jumped up and gave me his arm, and we went out, Elsie walking on the other side of me.

"I thought you were in Paris, Mr. Godfrey," said I.

"So I was last night, when it occurred to me to run over and have a peep at the Museum," said he.

And then, both at once, they began to give me an explanation, which would have been anything but clear if the sight I had seen had not explained itself.

"But, Guinevere, you don't understand; it is all a mistake," said Elsie. "I have told him I won't marry him. Do you think I am going to leave you all alone?"

"No. I have been beforehand with you," said I, smiling. "I am engaged to Eugene Barach."

"Are you?"—from both.

"Now, Guinevere, you must insist upon your younger sister's having me. It was I who persuaded her to give up all thoughts of the stage, so I have the best right to her. And, Elsie," asked Tom, "do you want to be left an old maid? You had better have me, and then our wedding shall be first."

Elsie's wedding was first; they were married two months later, just a week before Lady Kate gave her hand to the eldest son of a Lancashire millionaire.

Not long afterwards Eugene came to tell me that his father was just dead, and that he must go to live in the big lonely house in Berkshire; and I knew that, if my promise was to be worth anything, I must fulfil it now. Soon afterwards, without veil, bridesmaids, or breakfast, I was quietly married to him. I had written to my mother, who had taken up her residence permanently in France, and to my brother, who came to my wedding, and made a most favorable impression upon Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey, by his pretty manners. He is now in Mr. Godfrey's office, getting on rapidly, and already establishing a reputation for dressing well.

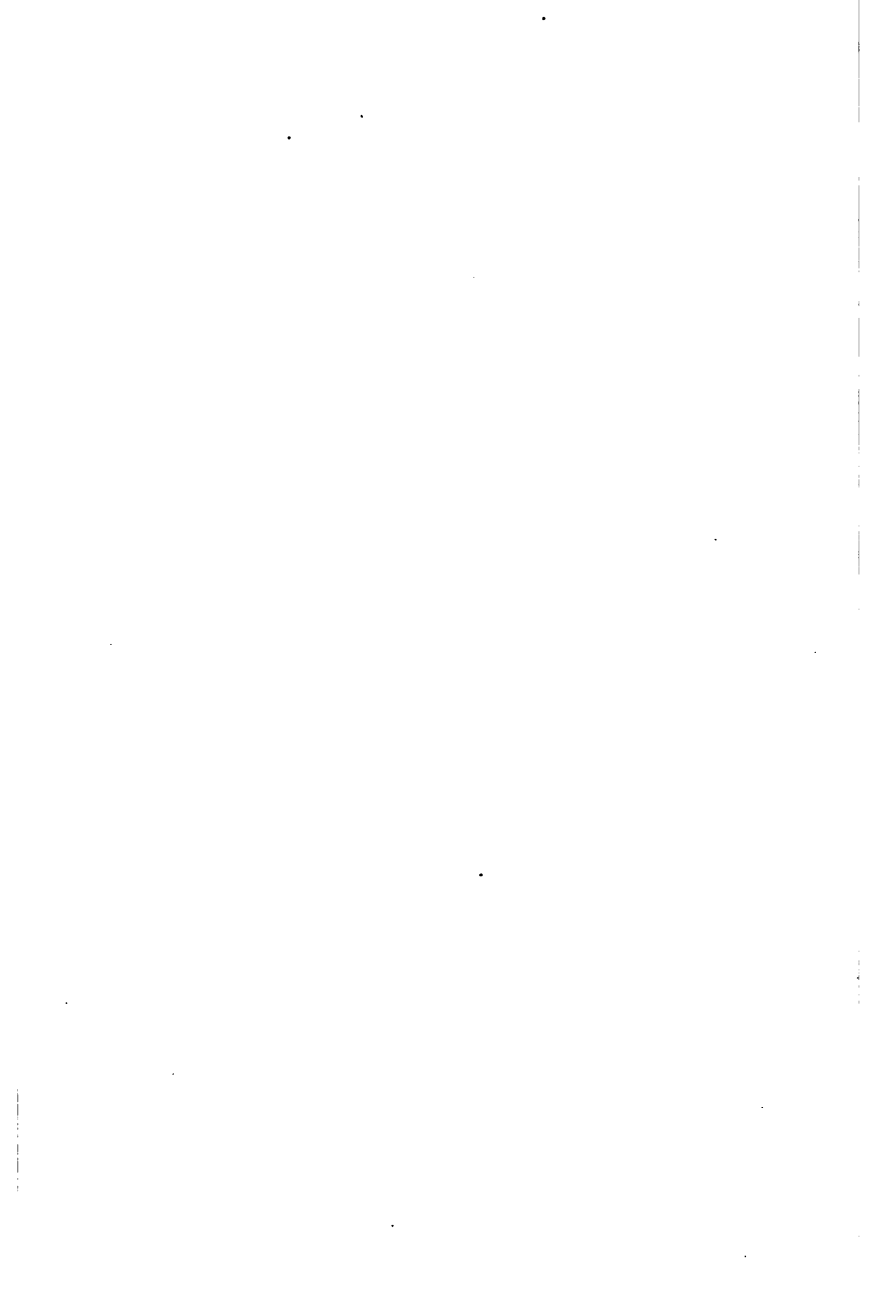
My husband and I lived very quietly at first; but, as the house

had a reputation for hospitality to be kept up, I gradually shook off my distaste for all society, and soon found myself in the full current of the life of "the world."

It is strange that the position I now hold should have been the height of my ambition as a young girl—still stranger perhaps that I, bred to the schoolroom, should have fallen into the life so easily. I have become successful as a hostess; I give my whole energies to a career the triumphs of which are my care and my pride. I have discovered that I have unwittingly gained a reputation for bitter epigram, that I am spoken of as "grave Lady Barach." Yet I am not unhappy. My husband is kind and tender, sympathises with my successes, is grateful for my share in his; but he is not quite content. He wants—waits for something more. It hurts me to see the patience with which he still hopes for the full, unreserved love which I cannot give him, though I know my life, as well as his, would be brighter if I could. I know he is worthy of all that a woman can give; I try hard to please him, amuse him, sharing his interests in life and upholding them when I can. I do give him all that is in my power now; and I am only twenty-five. Perhaps some day I shall be able to give him more; and I pray Heaven that I may.

FLORENCE WARDEN.

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